

SCATTERED FATES

a novel on the second partition of India

Ram Garikipati

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Email: ramboji@gmail.com

Blog: <http://www.seoulbuffoon.co.nr>

For
Eunmiya

AUTHOR SNAPSHOT

Ram Garikipati (42) is a business journalist based in Seoul, South Korea for the past ten years. He occasionally writes op-ed pieces for business newspapers, commentary for academic journals, rambles his thoughts on a personal blog as *Seoul Buffoon*, and takes up corporate projects that help him buy expensive treats for his four adorable dogs. He has just taken up a project to be Chief Editor of a bi-monthly magazine, published by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs, South Korea.

Before his freedom in the summer of 2012, he was head of corporate communications at the EU Chamber of Commerce in Korea and also Chief Editor of their monthly business publications for close to 8 years. Prior to this, he was a business reporter at The Korea Herald for less than a year.

An Indian citizen, by birth and choice, he relocated to Seoul in April 2004, to touch base with his soul, now his wife, who missed kimchi and preferred the morning calm of her own country to the unbearable heat and chaos in Bharat. He met her in New Delhi, while working for the business newspaper of The Hindu Group of Publications.

As Special Correspondent of The Hindu Business Line, from 1995 to 2004, he was responsible for coverage of Telecom/IT, Infrastructure, Finance and Macroeconomic issues. He was also a fortnightly columnist and edit page writer, under the byline G. Rambabu. He joined the newspaper soon after completing his M.Phil in Applied Economics from the Center for Development Studies (JNU).

To test the digital publishing waters, he authored two e-books: *Impetus for Growth* and *Realty Reality*, which are available on Amazon, Apple iBookstore, Barnes & Noble Nook store, Diesel eBook Store, Kobo, Sony Reader Store and Smashwords. *Impetus for Growth* explores the Financial, Energy and Food sectors in South Korea; dynamic engines of growth that hold huge potential for foreign investors. *Realty Reality* is a collection of 27 exclusive interviews with the leading players in Asian real estate. Buoyed by the response, he is now releasing his first fiction work for free. He pursues his passion, not to make money, but spread his ideas!

Scattered Fates is his debut novel, which marinated in his head for close to 5 years, but he only got to write it, after his azaadi. He hopes to be lucky enough to catch the eye of the public, so they can decide on the merits of his work, if any.

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GLOSSARY

PROLOGUE

One fact that has been overlooked in contemporary fiction set in India is that the country came very close to a second partition, the outcome of racial tensions, less than two decades after Independence from Great Britain. It has not been fictionally explored in the domestic English publishing media, perhaps due to fears of stroking tensions, which explains why mainline publishers were wary of bringing this out in the first place.

This is an alternate history fiction that seeks to bridge the gap, and explore the underlying tensions that continue to exist in present-day India, by borrowing from the historical experience of South Korea, a country that was divided after war. It is therefore important to be aware of the actual history of the anti-Hindi agitations of Tamil Nadu to appreciate the ‘what if’ scenarios in this novel.

The agitations in Tamil Nadu (formerly Madras State, and not Tamil Nad as North Indians call it even today) started a decade before Independence, in opposition to the introduction of compulsory teaching of Hindi in the schools of Madras Presidency by the first Indian National Congress government led by the ‘Mango of Salem’ C. Rajagopalachari.

This policy decision was immediately opposed and protests raged for three years, which included fasts, conferences, marches and picketing. The local government responded with a brutal crackdown resulting in the death of two protesters and arrest of 1,198 persons including women and children. The British Governor of Madras, Lord Erskine, was forced to withdraw the policy in February 1940 after resignation of the Congress Government.

During deliberations for framing the Indian Constitution after India's independence, adoption of an official language for the country was hotly debated, and a decision taken to adopt Hindi as the official language of India with English continuing as an associate official language for a period of fifteen years. However, efforts by the Central Government to make Hindi the sole official language after 1965 were not acceptable to many Southern Indian states, who wanted the continued use of English.

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), a minor political formation in Tamil Nadu at that time, led the opposition to Hindi, under the leadership of 'Arignar' C. N. Annadurai. To allay their fears, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, enacted the Official Languages Act in 1963 to ensure the continuing use of English beyond 1965. The text of the Act was wishy-washy and did not satisfy the DMK, which argued that Nehru's assurances might not be honored by future administrations.

Nehru died in May 1964 and Lal Bahadur Shastri became Prime Minister of India. Shastri and his senior cabinet members Morarji Desai and Gulzari Lal Nanda were strong supporters of Hindi being the sole official language. This increased the apprehension that Nehru's assurances of 1959 and 1963 will not be kept. Concerned over the preference of Hindi in central government jobs, civil service examinations and the fear that English would be replaced with Hindi as a medium of instruction, students joined the anti-Hindi agitations in large numbers. On 7th March 1964, the chief minister of Madras State, M. Bhaktavatsalam at a session of the Madras Legislative Assembly recommended the introduction of Three-language formula (English, Hindi and Tamil) in the state. Apprehension over the Three-language formula increased student support for the anti-Hindi cause.

The day (26th January 1965) of switching over to Hindi as sole official language approached, and the anti-Hindi movement gained momentum in Madras State with increased support from college students. The Tamil Nadu Students Anti Hindi Agitation Council was formed in January as an umbrella student organization to coordinate the anti-Hindi efforts. The office bearers of the council were student union leaders from all over Madras State. Several student conferences were organized to protest against Hindi imposition. The Madras State Anti-Hindi Conference was convened at Trichy and was attended by 700 delegates from Madras, Maharashtra, Kerala and Mysore. They called for the indefinite suspension of any move to sideline English. The Information & Broadcasting Ministry of the central government (headed by Indira Gandhi) upped the ante and issued circulars for replacing English with Hindi from 26th January.

Ten days before the deadline, Annadurai announced that the date would be observed as a day of mourning. He wrote to Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, asking for the language transition to be postponed by a week. Shastri refused, and the stage was set for confrontation.

The Chief Minister warned that he would not tolerate any blot on the sanctity of the Republic day and Annadurai was immediately taken into preventive custody along with 3,000 party members to forestall the agitations. The next day 50,000 students marched from Napier Park to the Government secretariat at Fort St. George to present a petition to the Chief Minister, who refused to meet them arguing that the protests were ‘not in the interests of national integration, not in the interests of higher education, and not in the interests of the students themselves.’

Stung by this insult, the students went berserk, they boycotted classes, made bonfire effigies of the ‘Hindi demoness,’ Hindi signs at railway stations and post offices were removed or blackened over, stores and public transport brutally

vandalized. As the riots spread, police responded with force firing on student processions, further inflaming the situation. Inspired by this, other citizens too started joining the lawlessness. Strikes, processions, and boycotts ruled the roost.

More disturbingly, scores of youngsters set themselves ablaze, effectively using kerosene to fuel the bonfire. In the first two days of protests, five students immolated themselves while three others consumed poison. One of the agitators was killed as a result of police firing, which only served to act as a catalyst for more violence. Three days later, classes in Madras University, Annamalai University and other colleges and schools in the State were suspended indefinitely.

Rioting continued throughout the first week of February. Finally, after 10 days, with the fires still raging, student representatives petitioned the Chief Minister to find a compromise. This time he reluctantly met them, but as expected, talks failed and it was back to square one. Not a day went by without protests. Fifteen days after the first stone was lobbed, the students lost control of protests.

By mid-February, around 70 people were killed. Some unofficial reports put the death toll as high as 500, and a large number of students were arrested. The Central Government was forced to sit up. Two senior cabinet ministers from Madras State demanded constitutional recognition for English as an official language, and tendered their resignation.

Faced with open revolt in his cabinet, the Prime Minister realizing he was cornered, backed down and made a national radio broadcast calling for a truce.

He made five assurances:

Every state will have complete and unfettered freedom to continue to transact its own business in the language of its own choice, which may be the regional language or English.

Communications between States will either be in English or will be accompanied by authentic English translation.

The non-Hindi states will be free to correspond with the central government in English and no change will be made in this arrangement without their consent.

In the transaction of business at the central level, English will continue to be used.

The All India Civil Services examination will continue to be conducted in English rather than in Hindi alone.

This effectively ended the agitation as it served to calm down the protestors.

Although sporadic protests continued till March 14th, victorious students went back to classes and DMK suspended the agitation, while Annadurai and the other leaders were released from detention.

However, Shastri's efforts to amend the Official Languages Act faced stiff resistance from the pro-Hindi lobby. Congress and opposition parties hesitated to debate the issue in Parliament, as they did not wish to make their bitter divisions public. The Congress working committee finally agreed to a resolution, which amounted to slowing down of Hindi-influence, strong implementation of the three languages, and conduct of the public services exam in all regional languages. The three-language formula was not strictly enforced either in South or North India. The changes to public services exams were impractical and not well received by government officials. The only real concession to the South was the assurance that the Official Languages Act would be modified. However, any effort to follow through with that pledge received stiff resistance.

In April 1965, a meeting of a cabinet sub-committee debated the issue and could not come to any agreement.

The sub-committee recommended the continuation of English and Hindi as joint link languages and was not in favor of either quota system or use of regional languages in public services exams. They drafted an amendment to Official Languages Act incorporating Nehru's assurances explicitly.

This Bill, guaranteeing the use of English in inter-state and state-Union communications as long as desired by Non-Hindi states, was approved for discussion by the Speaker on 25th August, but withdrawn after a bitter debate citing inopportune time.

Shastri died in January 1966 and Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister. The election of 1967 saw Congress retaining power with a reduced majority. In Madras State, Congress was defeated and DMK came to power. In November 1967, a new attempt to amend the Bill was made. On 27th November, the Bill was tabled in Parliament; it was passed on 16th December. It received presidential assent on 8th January, 1968 and came into effect. The Amendment modified section 3 of the 1963 Act to guarantee the virtual indefinite policy of bi-lingualism in official transactions.

The agitations of 1965 led to major political changes in the state. The DMK won the 1967 assembly election and the Congress Party never managed to recapture power in the state since then.

This novel is set at the cusp of these important changes.

As regards Korea, the country continues to be divided today, with an archaic dynastic communist ruler in the North, and a free democratic and prosperous society in the South. In this novel, the country is united, under a parliamentary form of government and mixed economy model.

Many of the political characters whose names are used in this novel actually existed and their biographical details are correct up to 1965.

As for Korean history, after the war, South Korea became a parliamentary democracy for a brief period of time (August 1960 to July 1961), when a military dictator dislodged the government and ruled ruthlessly for 18 years, enabling it to become an industrial powerhouse. The country became a democracy again only in 1987, but not in this novel. North Korea continues to be ruled by the third generation of Kim dynasty and is one of the most repressive and poor countries in the world, denying basic human rights to its citizens.

In this novel, the country is unified after the Korean War, to remain a parliamentary democracy, but still retaining its third world status.

I have no intention of hurting anyone's sentiments by this fictional narrative, taking liberty with political facts, which, in a hypersensitive country that India has become, is quite possible.

Chapter 1: WHEN NAGA MET MAYA

July 11, 2005, 9 pm

Sitting pensively on a plastic bucket seat at the arrival gates of Annadurai International Airport, Naga was sweating profusely. He always did, when he was tense.

It was a damp and sultry Monday. A light evening drizzle had sucked the mercury down a couple of notches, and the cool breeze blowing from the Bay of Bengal helped it slide even further, but that did not dissuade his hyperactive merocrine glands.

His forehead was moist, the thin beads of sweat slowly expanding in harmony, only to slide and dissolve into his bushy unibrow. A few more adventurous ones managed to escape sideways, desperately seeking to avoid the stress-acne, to find comfort in his hollow cheeks and the company of expensive aftershave lotion; a mingling of classes, so to speak.

Naga involuntarily sniffed at the pungent combination; absentmindedly patted his face lightly and wiped the cold wet palms on his jeans. Still lost in thoughts, he raised his left hand and glanced at his Rolex- a gift from his roommate Sunder, for his 33rd birthday last Thursday.

Bang on schedule, Korean Air flight CE608 from Pyongyang to Madras was circling overhead, ready to touchdown any moment now. Not long before his mundane solitary life could get a jolt of excitement, and twist out of shape beyond repair. Hoping against hope, he sidestepped his flirtation with atheism and prayed to Lord Venkateswara that Maya would not completely shatter his illusions.

After months of nerve-wracking wait, his online friend was finally arriving. Until now, all their social interactions were carried out over a distance of 3,296 miles, with romantic undercurrents splicing through the submarine cables and airwaves. But, it was time now to get real.

He vividly recalled her first email, seeking clarifications on his op-ed piece that dissected the political economy of South Asian countries over the past two decades. She accused him of using fraudulent data to camouflage the truth, arguing that IMF statistics showed otherwise.

One look at the email and he nailed the problem; her data was in nominal terms, while he had used PPP computations of gross domestic product.

How could any serious economics student make this mistake? She claims to be a research scholar at Corea University.

An unpleasant start to a shaky online friendship, that soon stabilized and branched out to personal interest in each other lives.

There still was one thing that bothered him, though.

She used every excuse possible to avoid Skype for a virtual chat. He had explained to her in great detail about this new software that enabled free webcam interactions, but she always came up with excuses to avoid installing it on her personal computer.

After a great deal of persuasion, she finally sent him a panoramic photograph, taken last winter, which only compounded his frustration. The Pyongyang scenery was captivating, no doubt, almost like a picture postcard; but her face was very hazy, and he suspected, minutely pixelated on purpose.

What was going on?

She even refused to tell him her age, admonishing him to be more patient. For all you know, she may have been testing the waters, but it vexed Naga a great deal. He had heard of numerous Internet scams that shattered the dreams of many a gullible bachelor, including one of his close colleagues.

Dravida was after all one of most industrialized and advanced countries in Asia, and a magnet for many of the impoverished citizens of third world countries like Korea, Thailand and Malaysia.

While many immigrants came to work in the 3D jobs (dirty, difficult & dangerous) in factories that his people loathed, some more wily ones crawled the web to entice gullible losers, grabbed a Green Card and disappeared.

Not that Naga was a loser. He was an experienced reporter in his country's largest English newspaper and came from a respectable family that brought many honors in the Indian Civil War.

Embarrassingly though, in a country where school kids half his age were experimenting with sexual partners, he was still a virgin.

I just hope she is who she claims to be.

Heck. He hardly knew anything about her, just the filtered tidbits through her irregular emails over the past 12 months. He mentally glued together the information he had so far.

The only child of a retired professor-couple at Pyongyang Development Institute, she is single, in her late twenties, liberal, loves to party, hates the petty-minded Korean guys and is pursuing her PhD at Corea University. Her research is bringing her to Madras and she needs help. Only the broad picture, and no fine details...

Did she send the first email just to lure me? Does she only want to use my contacts for her research?

In a moment of desperation, mixed with self-introspection, he decided to give her the benefit of doubt, as his father's favorite quotation slithered into his thoughts.

Whatever happens, happens for the good.

Maya never claimed any romantic interest and had made it clear at the outset that she was only seeking a friend who could help her during the stay in Dravida. He was guilty of taking the initiative to flirt, egged on by his loneliness and online porn. She finally responded, but cautiously.

Let's see whether nanagaru's motto holds. Hope he is alive and well...

Suddenly, his thoughts scrambled and he missed his father.

Although he had had no opportunity to create memories, and the only reminder was a weather-beaten photograph taken with two other gentlemen, which he kept carefully wrapped in a silk cloth, along with his father's diary.

While his father had maintained a record in Telugu for just the first 6 months in 1965, it was a goldmine of information into his mind.

According to government records, Hindustan agents kidnapped him in 1975. A few outliers argued that he was a communist spy and may have defected, but Naga dismissed the allegations as a crackpot conspiracy.

Reality hit, and his heart skipped a beat when a shrill announcement splintered the airport calm.

'Visitors, please be informed that Flight CE608 from Pyongyang has just landed at Annadurai International Airport. Your guests will be with you in a record 15 minutes. For your information, it takes 2 hours at Nehru International Airport, Delhi,' a shaky female voice bellowed in the familiar mallu accent.

Maya will walk out soon.

His chest swelled with pride upon the sudden realization that it takes such a short time for passengers to pass immigration, collect baggage and step out at the arrival gates. Not for nothing was Dravida's premier airport voted the best in the world for eight years in a row.

He had actually filed the story just an hour before racing to the airport. Every single jab at the northern neighbor warmed the cockles of his countrymen, more so Naga now, especially since his potential romantic interest apparently sympathized with Hindustan's outdated communist ideology, and would experience this efficiency first hand.

A few days here will change her mind.

He recalled the email exchange four weeks ago, which nearly made him block all contact with Maya.

It all began with an innocuous joke that he forwarded:

‘Thought this joke will help your research. It is actually true. A JNU professor asked the students: How many different economic systems exist in the world today?

A student replied: There are three. Our Aatmasamman economic system, Capitalism and Communism.

The professor asked again: Of these three, which system will be victorious in the end?

The student replied: I really can't say...

The professor was outraged: The answer is clear. Aatmasamman is the only system that will prevail over all other existing economic systems and become victorious in the end!

The student stammered and replied: Yes, I learned that... but when that happens, which country will give us food aid?’

Her reply in broken English was curt, to the point of being rude.

‘Please grow up. I do not like socialist jokes made by capitalists. Hindustan has the respect for self and not bend before American imperialism. It is better to share little wealth than be selfish. Socialism superior to the capitalism.’

It was a bit of a shock.

She is a leftist sympathizer, from a country that claims to be treading the high moral ground, although they cunningly receive material support from the Chinese. Moreover, Hindustan is just a Soviet satellite, claiming to follow its indigenous brand of self-reliance ideology, but everyone knew that its political foundation was communism. Respect for self, indeed!

He loathed communism, an ideology that divided erstwhile India and put his motherland on constant alert, always ready for war. More importantly, the Hindustani rogues kidnapped his father, and then claimed that he had defected. No one knew his father's fate. How could he ever forgive anyone sympathetic to those tyrants?

‘Bitch!’ he involuntarily screamed, as he read the reply and blood rushed to his head. He considered instantly snapping ties, ties that he had carefully nurtured for so long; but his weakness overpowered him, and a couple of apologies later, he was back to the usual email banter, trying to flirt as best as he could. And here he was now, eagerly looking forward to receiving her with open arms.

As the weary passengers from Pyongyang started streaming out of the departure gates, Naga suddenly panicked. He had never seen Maya. What if his fantasies crumbled? More importantly, how would he ever recognize her?

In his last email, Naga had foolishly mentioned that he would be wearing a dark blue shirt with a yellow handkerchief sticking out of the pocket, a scene borrowed from a popular Tamil movie; ‘Dollywood escapist trash’ as the New York Times called it. He never got a reply, and was not sure that she even had time to read his mail.

All of them look alike. The same slit eyes, pale skin, flat nose, chubby legs, and short build. How can they recognize each other?

He pulled out her photo from the pocket and carefully scrutinized dozens of Koreans walking past him, all of them giggling for no reason. A sudden whiff of garlic and rotten eggs made him throw up in the mouth. Naga had read about kimchi in his marathon online research on Korea, but never realized that fermented cabbage could be so powerful.

Then, he heard the soft voice behind him, almost hesitating: ‘Excuse me please. Are you Naga? I am Maya from Korea.’

He turned around to face an attractive young woman with unblemished skin, save the pimple on the tip of her nose. She was as tall as him, with an oval face, large brown eyes and a sharp nose. Her dark smooth hair fell to the shoulders, and she looked like a diva in the tight white top and khakhi shorts that showed off her curves - the exact opposite of other Korean women waddling in front.

‘Yes,’ he managed to reply, shoving the embarrassing yellow accessory and photograph out of sight, his heart thumping in excitement.

Is she really Maya? An illusion too good to be true!

‘So glad to finally meet you,’ he continued, secretly checking her out.

‘I am so grateful for your kindness. You look so young, small face,’ she complimented him. In her country, a smaller face was considered the epitome of beauty, since most of them had flabby cheeks that melted into their chin.

‘No, no, no, my face is really big. Hey, your English has improved quite a bit,’ he said, surveying her luggage. ‘You brought a huge suitcase. Do you plan to settle down here?’

‘Do you want me to?’ she giggled.

‘Will you, if I want?’ he asked, struggling to lift it.

‘That depends on how you treat me.’

Oh my God. We are already flirting.

‘You will not be disappointed.’

‘I hope not’ she replied, looking down at his dirty shoes. She was already disappointed with his fashion sense, but let it pass for the time being. His looks were not bad; slightly over-tanned skin, dark oily hair parted on the left, so neatly that each strand stood out; small angular face with a comical double-mustache, one above his nose and the other covering his upper lip. He was slightly taller than her and a little thin, but something that could be easily mended.

Thank God he is not creepy. He needs a serious haircut and facial makeover.

‘Wait here, while I get my car,’ Naga said, leaving her standing at the entrance gates with the luggage.

‘Are you sure it is safe for me?’

‘Of course Ma’am, this is not Delhi,’ he hollered, disappearing behind the pillar, towards the parking lot.

Maya clutched her purse close to the chest, with one hand firmly gripping her suitcase. Young ladies stayed indoors in Pyongyang after sunset and only ventured out accompanied by a male. If this had been her hometown, she would already have been accosted by a few touts, with many more frustrated youngsters leering with open mouths and waiting for an opportunity to touch her inappropriately, teasing her for being ‘dented and painted’.

In fact, just a week before she left, there had been a gruesome assault on a young college student near her home that had made her parents very jittery. They pleaded with her not to go to a foreign country alone, but she was determined to get away.

Surprisingly, no one bothered her here, although she stood out, and was a foreigner in a strange land. It was the first time she had traveled abroad, and was thankful for small mercies.

A few minutes ticked by, and the only interruption was a policeman who inquired whether she needed help.

Before long she noticed Naga driving up in his BMW M3.

Looks like an expensive car. I am sure it costs ten times abboji’s annual salary.

It would be her first ride in a foreign car. There were only a dozen imported cars in Corea, all of them in Seoul, the business capital of her country, and none in the capital Pyongyang. In her lifetime, she had seen similar cars only in movies. ‘Isn’t this car expensive?’ she asked, as Naga loaded her suitcase into the trunk. ‘Aiyo no. It is a second-hand 1990-model, very cheap. I am a journalist and we do not get corporate salaries,’ he replied. ‘Com’on get in... Hey, do I look like a driver? Get in the front with me.’

‘Sorry. Not used to sitting in private car.’

‘It’s OK, you will get used to it.’

‘Did you book a Guesthouse for me till I find my own apart?’ ‘Apart? Oh you mean apartment. No need for that. My roommate Sunder is away, and we have an extra room. You can stay till he gets back from his trip,’ he said changing gears.

‘Fine with me, I can save my research funds.’

‘So how was our trip? Did you get enough rest?’

‘No, I was too excited to sleep. I watched two English movies.’

‘I thought they show Dollywood movies also on the flight to Madras.’

‘Yes they do...but I found them very boring. I have watched a few Hindi movies in Corea and really liked them. They are more realistic with a strong message to convey.’

‘Dollywood movies are entertaining, if you have the patience for musicals. All our movies are escapist, but at least they are honest. Hindi movies on the other hand all propagate Aatmasamman and are made to develop a personality cult of the dynasty.’

‘I do not think so, the Hindi movies I saw had nothing to do with their leader Sanjay Nehru or even Indira Nehru.’

‘It’s not so simple, there will always be underlying messages, not so obvious to outsiders.’

‘Don’t Dollywood movies also propagate capitalism? None of the movies ever show income inequalities or poverty, but only glorify monetary wealth.’

‘You are mistaken, we do have strong parallel cinema, but outsiders are aware of only the commercial movies. I will take you to some award-winning realistic movies during your stay here. By the way, you seem to be quite knowledgeable

about our movies, does your research have anything to do it?’ he asked, turning on the ignition.

‘Hey, I told you before, it has nothing to do with the movie industry. I am studying the contradictions in capitalist countries after civil war. They always grow faster in the short term, but suddenly collapse because of contradictions. On the other hand, socialist countries have a slow start but prosper in the long term.’

‘Is that why Soviet Union and China are still struggling while USA is the world’s richest country?’ he sneered, unable to believe her.

‘No. You misunderstand. Soviet Union and China are communist states, not socialist. There is a lot of difference. I am talking of divided socialist countries like Hindustan, Scotland and Quebec.’

‘The difference is only in semantics. So you admit that today they are failed states, but hope to prosper in the long term. Say, 200 years? For your information Dravida, England and Canada, all capitalist countries, are economically superior and thriving for a longtime. No one starves, all citizens are taken care of, and they will only grow stronger.’

‘Who said Hindustan, Scotland and Quebec are failed states? Unlike capitalist countries, they are first trying to fix inequalities and then develop the economy. It takes time. And whose fault is it? All the countries that you just mentioned, which are only putting roadblocks in their progress.’

‘It gets on my nerves, this holy posturing by communists, sorry socialists... whatever. They are all mango people in banana republics, tolerating no dissent while their ordinary citizens starve. I am sorry, but for me freedom is very important. I can call my President an ass and no one will touch me.’

‘Is that why your father defected to Hindustan?’ she countered, and immediately bit her lip.

Shocked, Naga slammed the brakes.

‘Who told you that?’ he raised his tone.

Realizing the faux pas, and not expecting such a violent reaction, Maya remained quiet, as Naga continued in a stern voice. ‘Nanagaru was kidnapped in broad daylight at Madras Central by those commies. He fought courageously for our independence. Why would he defect?’

Actually, there was no concrete evidence about his father’s whereabouts; whether he was kidnapped, murdered, met an accident, or ran away to Hindustan- only one eyewitness account, which was skimpy on details.

One fine day, July 25, 1975, to be precise, he just disappeared, and the family never heard from him again, but Hindustan issued an official statement a month later.

‘We are honored to announce that Comrade Subbaiah has defected to our great vatan. He has come on his own free will and is enjoying a peaceful life in our prosperous country. His defection is an eruption of the wrath and grudge against the South Indian conservative ruling forces that exploit and oppress the working people while imposing unemployment and poverty upon them. Supreme Leader Indira Nehru and Young General Sanjay Nehru are saviors of our nation and the eternal lodestar of national reunification that all the Indians hold in high esteem as the sun for their destiny. We are not surprised that Comrade Subbaiah has seen the truth. The South Indian group of traitors is well advised to renounce foolish attempts to break the single-minded unity of our society.’

No photos, no evidence. Just that.

‘I’m sorry. Let us change the topic,’ Maya muttered.

Still trembling with anger, he revved up the engine, and changed lanes to enter the expressway.

The next 20 minutes flew by in total silence, with Naga glaring ahead at the road and Maya thinking of ways to break the tension.

He started sweating again.

What have I done? Shouted at her in the first hour. What will she be thinking?

Luckily Maya took the initiative to break the ice. ‘What is your fathers full name? Everyone knows him as Subbaiah.’

‘P. Subbaiah,’ he replied softly, still kicking himself in his head.

‘I meant full name?’

‘Pallypalli,’ he said, even as Maya muffled her laugh.

‘What’s so funny? You know it is rude.’

‘Sorry... but do you know what palli palli means in Corean? It means to do something in a hurry, as fast as possible. So you are Naga Palli Palli, right? Suits you...losing your temper in a hurry.’

‘Actually Dravidians use only initials for all official purposes, so as I told you before, I am P. Nagarjuna. It is the government policy to weed out the caste system from our society, unlike in Hindustan where people proudly attach caste identities to their names. What about you? The real name cannot be Maya, it doesn’t sound Corean.’

‘You are right; I adopted this name, since I thought it will be easier here. My real name is Choi Eu-hoo.’

‘That’s an even funnier name,’ he said with a deadpan expression, inwardly smiling at his revenge, remembering the popular joke about how Chinese kids are named.

Many educated Dravidians still believed that newborn Chinese kids were named after the sounds from empty silver vessels dropped on Buddhist temple floors.

Maya gave a weak twitch, not wanting to make a fuss. She was glad she restrained herself, for it helped lighten the mood, and by the time they arrived at his apartment complex, or apart as she called it, he was humming a popular Korean tune by the Wonder Girls.

I want nobody nobody But You, I want nobody nobody But You...

‘So C-Pop has reached Dravida?’ she asked.

‘Not really, I checked it on the Internet. No one in Dravida is aware of hallyu, but they will learn. A few years from now they may do some silly horse-dance steps to Korean music. By the way, I’m really sorry about my outburst. I don’t know what got into me.’

‘I understand. I too am attached to my father and shouldn’t have brought up the topic.’

‘We have almost reached home. See that building ahead, I live on the 26th floor,’ he cut her short.

‘26th floor? The tallest in Pyongyang and Seoul have only 15 floors. How many floors does this building have?’ she said craning her neck out the window to catch a better look. She had failed to notice the skyscrapers on the way from the airport, as she had been busy arguing. If she had, it would likely have made her head spin.

‘The tallest in Hindustan has only 10. I live in a 40-storey building, but it is one of the smaller ones in Madras, as it was built in the eighties.’

‘It does not look too old.’

‘That’s because it is well maintained, actually, this is the old part of the city. I will take you downtown tomorrow. You can easily make out the difference.’

‘If the old town is so modern, I wonder how the new town will be,’ she thought. Maya was once again amazed when the gates of his complex, automatically opened when their car neared.

‘How come there are no security guards. How did the gates open?’

‘Maya, Maya, Maya.... welcome to Madras. Everything here is automated. You see this chip on the dashboard; it is a security access chip. Every resident here has one. It automatically unlocks the gates and screens passengers. Your snapshot is already in the database by now. No outsider can enter unauthorized. All the security guards are inside, monitoring everything outside.’

Preempting more queries, he mentioned that the building had six underground parking lots, as he steered the car to his allotted spot on B4. She decided not to ask more questions, lest she make a fool of herself. All the background research had not prepared her for this, maybe because the dial-up connections in Corea only allowed for text-based Internet surfing.

In fact, every time Naga pestered her for a Skype chat, she had to give some excuse, embarrassed to tell him that it is not possible from Corea. Only she knew the hell she had to go through to, just for scanning and sending him that photograph. She expected Dravida to be a little more modern than Corea, but the pace of development that she saw around her was unbelievable, and this was just in the initial few hours.

He first shock was when she got down from the airplane and walked into the expansive bright terminal with sweeping rooflines. The marvelous piece of infrastructure was very clean and neatly maintained with innumerable facilities. The Pyongyang international airport, by contrast seemed like a village bus station. Her professors had not been very truthful either, and convinced her that Dravida was only marginally more developed than Corea and Hindustan.

What nonsense. It will certainly take another 20 years for Corea to reach this level of development.

The elevator sped up to the 26th floor, and she suddenly felt very light as the blood bounced softly into her lungs. Looking out of the glass enclosure, she was amazed at the sight of Madras at night.

The entire city seems to be filled with skyscrapers, glittering like jewels. This will surely be an experience to cherish.

‘Isn’t the sight amazing? All our big cities, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Cochin are similar. We will travel soon and you will know. In Hindustan, only Delhi has electricity. Of course, you have seen the latest cover of Economist.’

She knew what he was talking about. The Economist magazine that she borrowed from her professor had a midnight photo of the subcontinent taken from the skies. It clearly showed a glittering Dravida, and Pakistan with a black space in between, with just a few glowing lights in and around Delhi. Almost like a censor-strip that her country often placed on offending maps that placed parts of Corea as Chinese territory.

Her professor had argued that the pallbearer of the free market system had intentionally manipulated the image, and it was what she believed, but decided to keep quiet.

She watched as Naga punched in the security code to his door, and hoped he would not talk of antiquated steel locks in Hindustan. Luckily he did not.

‘Welcome to my abode, you can stay in the room over there. Don’t worry about the heat, this building is centrally air-conditioned,’ he said, pointing to the room on his right. ‘My room is to the left, as is my roommates, and this in front is the study-room. You will get total privacy.’

She surveyed the living room and was taken in by the neatness. Everything seemed to be in order, although minimalist. It was quite large, unlike Corean homes, where more importance was given to bedrooms.

An exquisite leather sofa was placed at the center, with a large flat black screen on the opposite wall, the likes of which she had never seen before.

Two bookshelves on either side of the screen gave out intellectual vibes. While one was filled with hardbound covers in English, the other was crowded with books in scripts that were alien to her.

‘What is that?’ She said pointing towards the screen.

‘Why, that’s my television, haven’t you seen an HDTV before? It is Dayanora’s latest model. A friend got me a steep discount,’ he replied. ‘I am sure you know that Dyanora Group is Dravida’s pride. It includes the world’s largest IT Company, second-largest shipbuilder, and 5th largest construction companies.’

‘I know, read about it in my class on Asian Tigers. The company has a powerful influence on your economic development, politics, media and culture, and has been a major driving force behind your growth, right?’ she said.

Naga flicked on the remote, as she gasped at the amazing true-life images on the screen. He kept jumping channels, until he came to CBS, Corean’s state broadcaster,

whose staple offering was farming programs and news read by middle-aged women hitting menopause.

‘Yeah, sure, I changed my satellite provider for your sake, so that you can watch this Corean channel if you are ever homesick.’

‘Thanks, but that won’t be necessary. I want to watch Dollywood movies.’

‘The bathroom in your room is quite small. Hope you don’t mind.’

‘I am sure it is bigger than my entire house. There is only one small detail. I come from a very cold country and we use toilet paper. Hope there is enough stock.’

‘Don’t worry; we all use the bidet and toilet paper here in Dravida. Hindustan of course is underdeveloped and most of them shit on the streets. They have more temples than toilets,’ he mocked in triumph, yet again.

Maya did not respond. She still had time to retort back with smarter quips. Moreover, she was exhausted from the long journey and just wanted to hit the sack.

‘Hope you like your room. I have already put your luggage in the closet with the fresh towels and blankets. The toilet is equipped with all the stuff you may need.’

‘I hope I can now take a hot shower and sleep. I am really tired. Thanks for all the help Naga.’

‘You are welcome. Are you sure you don’t want anything to eat or drink? My fridge is well stocked, so is my bar, help yourself. We can chat tomorrow morning.’

‘Sure will. Goodnight. Please wake me up at 8,’ she said, closing the door behind her.

‘Goodnight.’

He heaved a sigh of relief, staring at the door for a few minutes. He had messed up by losing his temper, but hopefully Maya would not remember tomorrow.

‘She is smart and attractive. I have to control my emotions and should not mock her cultural ignorance,’ Naga thought, as he lumbered towards his room, a glass of scotch in hand, humming the Korean tune again.

Chapter 2: GAZING AT STARS

July 11, 1965, 9 pm

It was a hot and humid Sunday. The sun had been beating down harshly the entire day, and there was no respite, even as the wind tried cooling its temper and the moon slowly nudged it out of sight.

Lost in thoughts, Subbaiah sat depressed on a wooden bench, under a dim incandescent street light, near the entrance gates of Madras University, while close by, a couple of hundred students gathered around the impromptu stage that had been setup. The sky was more or less clear, except for a few playful clouds teasing the moon, while the stars winked along.

Unmindful of these antics above, the students waited with bated breath for the arrival of their biggest star on land, supreme leader of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.

It would not be long before Conjeevaram Natarajan Annadurai, fondly called Alaignar Anna, or simply Anna, would arrive to make a special announcement.

Subbaiah had the onerous task of organizing this meeting, and it was not easy. He had been asked to gather a few thousand students, but only around 100 had turned up so far.

It was not his fault. MGR's latest blockbuster Aayirathil Oruvan, opposite a stunning new heroine Jayalalitha had just been released on Friday. The swashbuckling action-adventure pirate film had received a thunderous ovation, with youngsters flocking to theaters across Madras.

All his students had given glowing accounts of the movie. Although youngsters' testimony on MGR movies could never be trusted, Subbaiah was quite tempted. He had made plans to see the late-night show with his wife, but then unexpectedly received summons from the party headquarters to organize a students meeting to be attended by Anna himself.

A year ago, disillusioned with the state government led by Minjur Bhaktavatsalam of the Indian National Congress, he had enrolled as a primary member with the minor opposition party DMK, which had won just 50 out of 206 seats in the previous elections.

Till seven months ago, he was only one of the countless faceless cadres who devoted themselves to their party ideology, expecting little in return. However, January 26th changed everything.

Thanks to Subbaiah, the organized force of Madras students held back the imposition of Hindi, while the remaining victims from across the other southern states played safe, enjoying the ringside view. With all the party honchos behind bars, it was up to Subbaiah to organize the student protests and spark the agitations that rattled Prime Minister Shastri.

After the matter was resolved, with an assurance from Shastri that English would continue as an associate language, Subbaiah's role in galvanizing the students was duly noted, and he was made the Coordinator of Student Activities across the State. It was a direct order of Anna, he had been told. He was also invited to meet his leader personally next week, to discuss a more active role for him in the party.

Subbaiah hailed from neighboring Andhra State, a golti, as the locals called him, where the protests were not widespread, and guessed that the DMK wanted him to play a key role in popularizing the party in his home state. It would of course mean

that he would either have to travel frequently or take up a job at Andhra University in Vishakhapatnam.

Now, nearly four months after all the drama and action, Anna's sudden decision to address students of his university today puzzled him. He wondered whether there were any new developments that he was unaware of.

He read four newspapers every morning in the library, and also listened to BBC Overseas Service in the evening. There was no mention of any dramatic change in circumstances.

The Senate House loomed in front of him. Although the building incorporated many elements of the Byzantine style, and was considered to be the finest of its kind in India, it was of little interest to him now. The most important goal was to get thousands of students for Anna's meeting.

'Machchan' he shouted, suddenly spotting Ganapathy walking at a brisk pace ahead.

Pudukottai Ganapathy Iyer, his closest friend, colleague and neighbor, like him, taught Economics at the University. However, unlike Subbaiah, never dabbled in politics, and was mostly indoors during the agitation. Nevertheless, he was Subbaiah's close confidant, and a great intellectual punching bag.

'Hello Subbaiah, what are you doing here on Sunday evening? Came for a stroll on Marina alone?' he asked, pointing towards the long stretch of beach that embraced the road in front.

'Anna is arriving soon, and this is my first big event. He wants to meet students, but most of them are at Shanthi Talkies.'

‘Aayirathil Oruvan? Saw it yesterday. Great fights thalaivar! That new girl is also too good. Why does Anna want to meet students now? I thought he gave up the agitation 3 months ago.’

‘I have no idea. I was given the order and am just carrying it out.’

‘You know Subbaiah, I am your well wisher. I once again plead with you... these politicians are playing a dangerous and selfish game. They want to divide India for their personal gains. Do not fall into their trap.’

‘Ganapathy, I know your feelings and you know that is not true. My party dropped the secessionist demand two years ago. This meeting has nothing to do with Hindi, anti-Brahmanism or Dravida Nadu. Please don’t argue, and just help me now.’

That was not necessarily true. There was a growing movement in Madras State against the Tamil Brahmins who were held responsible for direct or indirect oppression of lower-caste people, who made up a majority of the population. The ‘self-respect movement,’ was started decades before India’s independence and continued to this day. The legacy of the anti-Brahmanism was taken over by his party, which included a demand for a separate nation. As it was contemplated, the new nation would consist of the regions where the people of Dravidian origin lived and spoke the Dravidian languages of Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu.

In November 1963, DMK dropped its secessionist demand in the wake of the Sino-Indian War and the passage of the 16th Amendment to the Indian Constitution that prohibited those who advocate separatism from running for public offices. Many other splinter groups continued to fight for it.

‘OK. So what can I do? Search for all students and force them to attend this meeting?’

‘Of course not, da. Ideas. I need ideas.’

‘Well, let’s see... all the students are crazy for MGR. Why not spread the word that he is coming here with Anna? You know MGR is a big DMK supporter. Once the students come, you can make some lame excuse.’

‘Genius. Excellent. Wonderful. I will call Senthil right away. Can I use your phone? The University offices are all closed?’

‘Sure. I am meeting some old friends for Chicken 65 at Mount Road Buhari, but Vijaylaxmi is at home, go ahead.’

‘Why Mount Road? There is Buhari very close by. Is the biryani different?’

‘No thalaivar, I want to go to Higginbotham’s and buy some books,’ he said, referring to the largest bookstore in the country, quite close to Aaram Buhari Restaurant.

Truth was, his caste dictated that he be a strict vegetarian. Even his wife Vijaylaxmi was unaware that he occasionally pampered himself with non-veg dishes, having developed a taste, during his Masters in London.

He steadfastly avoided the restaurants near the university, lest someone familiar saw him. There was a lesser risk on Mount Road.

Subbaiah on his part wanted to try out the famous Buhari biryani since joining the university a year ago, but never got the chance. The original restaurant was on Mount Road, but with growing popularity they recently opened more branches, including one near the University, complete with a jukebox for students.

His wife Malathi was a vegetarian by choice, and he never picked up the courage to venture alone. Almost as if teasing him, only a month ago, they had started offering an extremely popular spicy deep fried dish - Chicken 65. His students told him that the flavor was heavenly. This would have been the perfect opportunity to

try it, but that was the least of his worries now. Ganapathy had one of the only four working telephones on campus.

‘OK, thanks,’ Subbaiah said as he raced toward the residence quarters behind the University building.

#

Forty-five minutes later, Subbaiah was back on spot, walking in front of Senate Hall, sweating profusely. The crowd had swelled.

Not enough, maybe around three hundred.

He had explained to Senthil, Anna’s personal assistant, about using MGR as bait and had received full support. He was assured that the news would spread across all other colleges. It now appeared that it was difficult to spread rumors on a Sunday.

Sitting on the same wooden bench, he looked at the crowd and lowered his head in dejection. There was nothing more he could do. Anna would not be pleased.

All my dreams of a political career are finished. This was an excellent opportunity to impress Anna, and MGR blew it. Why wasn’t the movie released next week? I guess this is the end.’

‘Excuse me Professor Palli Palli,’ a low voice called out.

He looked up to notice the smiling face of the new exchange student from Corea, and a few others who seemed to be from the northeast. Assam? Nagaland? He could not tell.

‘Hello Moon, how are you? By the way I prefer to be called Professor Subbaiah. We do not encourage using the family name, as it identifies ones caste. In fact, we are trying hard to outlaw it,’ he replied. ‘Adjusting well? Weather and food?’

‘Weather is very hot sir, and the food is very different. I will adjust. We go to Parry’s Corner for noodle soup regularly,’ he said.

Subbaiah had heard about the restaurants near Parry’s Corner, close to the port. Burmese refugees who fled during the early sixties had opened a few shops, on land the government set aside to help them settle.

‘Do not expect genuine Korean food in Madras, but there are many restaurants on Mount Road run by the Chinese immigrants from Calcutta. I will let you know tomorrow,’ he said, adding, ‘Make many friends?’

‘Yes sir, I have a few in the hostel, but not anyone from my class.’

‘Give it a little more time. Maybe they are shy. You should wear a lungi, it will help you bear the heat and also meet local students,’ he said, well aware it was not true.

No local student ever became friends with exchange students, and dressing like a local would not change that. He had seen it happen all the time. Language was a big unifying factor, and all of them hung out only with fellow students who spoke the same tongue.

The exchange students had to form their own groups, but strangely, those from China, Japan and Korea never got along, though they separately seemed to enjoy a very good rapport with the Northeast students. Maybe it was their similar looks, or English was the common denominator.

‘We heard there is some kind of a meeting here, and came to look.’

‘Oh, yes, it is an important students meeting. Why don’t you tell all your friends to come,’ he said, hoping that Anna would not notice their different physical characteristics in the dark. A hundred more heads would certainly help. ‘These are

my friends here,' he said, pointing towards a dozen students, who looked similar to him, except with darker skin.

'What about your Chinese and Japanese friends?' he said unknowingly touching a raw nerve.

'They can never be my friends,' Moon said bitterly.

Taken aback, Subbaiah, decided to cross-examine later, and changed the topic.

'Well, you heard of MGR, right? He is one of our leading superstars. He will be coming here soon. You can hang around and see him.'

'Very well sir,' Moon said, still unable to understand all this fuss about a movie star.

Suddenly a loud roar erupted from the crowd ahead, and Subbaiah instinctively stood up. He could not believe his eyes. Standing on the stage was MGR himself. His rumor had been transformed into reality.

'Moon, there he is,' Subbaiah shouted excitedly, as he raced towards the stage.

As he drew closer, he spotted an agitated Senthil, raising his fist at a few students. His heart still thumping, he shouted: 'Senthil Saar!'

'Hello professor, what is this nonsense?I got MGR here with great difficulty. He had to cancel a shooting. Where are all the students?'

'They are on their way. All of them are at Shanthi Talkies. MGR movie you know.'

'The real man is here. Go get everyone,' Senthil said in a guttural tone, as he turned away annoyed.

Apparently, there was no need to. News of MGR's appearance spread like wildfire and in less than 15 minutes, there were more than 2000 faces peering at the stage, hysterical and shouting slogans.

Subbaiah looked back and noticed that many more were on the way. The swelling crowd now consisted not just of students, but also shopkeepers and families who had come for a quite evening on Marina Beach.

Puratchi Nadigar!

Ponmana Chemmal! Makkal Thilakam!

Each slogan coined for the superstar made the crowd even more delirious, as they chanted in unison.

‘What are they calling him sir?’ Moon asked.

Surprised to find him still around, Subbaiah replied, ‘leader of actors, golden-hearted and darling of the masses. That is what everyone calls MGR. He is a gem of a man. One in a thousand.’

Suddenly, he saw Senthil run towards him. This time there was a huge grin, the white teeth radiated against his dark skin.

‘Professor. Great job. This place is too small for everyone. I will inform Anna to come directly to the Beach. Why don't you tell MGR, and get all the students there?’ he said, pointing across the road, at the glittering sand in the moonlight. Earth's natural satellite was waxing gibbous, and would be fully luminous two nights later.

‘Me? Talk to MGR?’ he stammered, not believing his ears. He was being told to talk to one of his idols face to face. It would be an honor. The Gods are really merciful.

My educational qualifications are no match for this uneducated darling of the masses.

‘Of course, I have no time, Anna should be here soon, and I have to wait for him at the traffic light,’ Senthil said, folding his white lungi and scampering away.

Subbaiah turned around and looked at the stage. A few party workers had formed a cordon around the superstar who was raising his folded palms above the head.

Moon was not to be seen anymore, neither were his friends.

He made his way towards the stage, with the help of a few students who cleared the way screaming: ‘Professor Subbaiah coming. Make way!’

Most of the crowd knew him, and it did not take long to reach the stage. He approached a party worker, and whispered into his ears.

‘Apdi aa?’ the party worker said, leading him up the stairs and into the inner circle.

Standing just a few feet away was the most handsome man Subbaiah had ever seen. Although he had a slight paunch, and was slightly balding, MGR was the personification of manhood. Even his skin was different from ordinary mortals like him. It glistened in the dark. Rumor had it that he mixed gold dust in his morning cup of milk. No one could match his persona, except of course NTR, the Telugu superstar, who was Subbaiahs original idol.

‘Wait here,’ the party worker said, as he went forward and mentioned something to MGR.

With his hair gently blowing in the breeze, a smiling MGR motioned him to come forward.

‘Puratchi Nadigar, it is a great honor to finally meet you,’ Subbaiah mumbled.

‘I heard you organized this crowd, and forced me to come here at this late hour.’

‘I am very sorry. Anna had something very important to tell the students and they are all watching your latest movie.’

‘Did you watch it? How is the new girl? Should I make more movies with her?’

‘Yes, of course, first day first show, the story and action scenes were superb. So were the songs. You should act in more movies with her. She is a very beautiful and good luck for you,’ he blurted, condensing his students’ reviews.

‘Well, a professor is never wrong. I will take your advice,’ MGR winked. ‘Sir, the crowd is more than expected. Anna wants to move the venue to Beach.’

‘Is there a stage there?’

‘No, but we can manage something. Don’t worry about the crowd, we will protect you.’

‘I don’t need any protection from my fans. Let’s go,’ MGR replied.

#

Thirty minutes later, Senthil had managed to arrange for a makeshift stage, as the crowd swelled to over 6000. Anna, MGR and a few other DMK leaders were huddled in a corner engrossed in discussions, even as the crowd was growing restless.

Subbaiah could recognize two other people. One was the number two in the party, Leader Nedunchezhiyan, and the other was Kalaighnar Karunandhi.

He did not know much about Nedunchezhiyan, but was well aware of Karunanidhi’s career as the screenwriter for Parasakthi, the movie that launched Shivaji Ganesan, another fine actor espousing the ideologies of the Dravidian movement.

Two other movies written by Karunanidhi that contained such messages were Panam and Thangarathnam, both movies he had appreciated. They contained themes such as widow remarriage, abolition of untouchability, self-respect marriages, abolition of zamindari and religious hypocrisy, something close to Subbaiah's heart.

'All the stars in one spot, I hope this appears in tomorrow's newspaper,' he thought, while cursing himself for having forgotten to inform the reporters. One paragraph in The Hindu would have made a huge impact for Anna's announcement, whatever it was going to be.

The Hindu, was one of the most respected English newspapers in the country, although its circulation was more or less restricted to South India. If anything appeared in the paper, you could be sure of a reaction.

Luckily for him Senthil had made the arrangements, and he spotted a few familiar faces in front, including The Hindu reporter.

Standing a few feet away, Moon was puzzled, trying to make sense of this whole situation.

I can't believe movies play such an important role in driving public opinion. Thousands of people at midnight just to catch a glimpse of some stocky actor.

He had been warned about coming to India for his year-long exchange program. His economics professor at Corea University had advised him to go to a European country.

'Western Europe has so much to teach the world. The civilization is solely responsible for this advancement in human life and social welfare. Go to London or Paris. Do not choose capitalist America or communist Russia. Avoid China and Japan. Most importantly, ignore filthy and poor countries like India. You will only

suffer and learn nothing. Their culture is different from ours,' Professor Jee Dong-hoon, a devout Buddhist, had told him.

Fourteen days after this discussion, and just 2 days before submitting his application Professor Jee was dismissed by the university for plagiarism, fake educational credentials, and for claiming false expenses.

It is a sign that I should choose India. I should go.

He was almost regretting his decision now. The daytime weather was unbearable, with the temperatures touching almost 42 degrees Celsius. It was difficult to concentrate in class, trying to decipher the weird accents drenched in one's own sweat. He had to take a shower at least 5 times a day. Only the nights were bearable, outdoors.

His hostel room was no different. Unluckily, his roommate, Vinay Sharma, from the North Indian town of Ayodhya, had no sense of hygiene. Although he claimed to come from a rich upper-caste family he wore the same set of smelly clothes for days on end. The odor decapitated his senses and made him spend most nights in his friends' rooms, although it meant sleeping on the cement floor, with cockroaches and rats occasionally turning up to greet him.

The food was yucky and he threw up every time he ate at the hostel canteen.

They call it 'mess' here...it sure is one! They only serve vegetarian food, with that regular dish that looks like liquid ttong... and they call it sambar.

Oh, how he missed the four seasons in Korea, the pleasant smells, kimchi, kamzhatang, and soju.

I have to get out. Professor Jee was right. This is a filthy place.

His depressive thoughts were scrambled by the loud announcement through the megaphone. All his friends had left, but Moon decided to stay back out of curiosity. He did not understand a word, and was in no mood to hunt for friendly translators. He just stood staring at the stage.

‘I thought you had left,’ a voice startled him.

‘Hello sir, you did not go on stage? I saw you with MGR before.’

‘Of course not, only leaders do that. I am not one. By the way, where are your friends?’

‘They got bored. I was also about to leave.’

‘You better not. The fun is just starting. Can you see those three people with MGR? They are our leaders. All them have gathered here to tell us something very important.’

‘Sir, I have just one question. How can a film actor be a leader? Is he also a politician?’ Moon asked.

‘His full name is Maruthur Gopalan Ramachandran. I know it is difficult to memorize. He is not just an actor but also a social reformer and politician. He made his film debut in the 1936 and now dominates our film industry. He became a member of my party DMK in 1953 with the help of that short guy to his right, Karunanidhi, who is also a famous scriptwriter for movies,’ he said pointing towards the stage.

‘MGR adds glamour to our movement and is also a member of our Legislative Council. He is very charismatic, and has been responsible for the phenomenal increase in our party membership. A lot of young people are joining our fight to help the poor and bring social reforms. He is not just a famous actor but also a great leader in his own right, and personally offers relief in disasters and calamities

like fire, flood, drought, and cyclones. He was also the first donor to the war fund during our recent war with China. He gave 75,000 rupees,' Subbaiah continued.

'Sir, I am still confused about your movement.'

'Well, there is no time to explain, maybe some other time; I can only say that our objectives include social equality, justice and eradication of caste oppression.

Now... let us listen to what they will announce,' he said, noticing Senthil hand over the microphone to Anna, as the crowd roared in approval.

Chapter 3: OLD MAN AT THE SEA

Maya woke up with a jolt, as the pounding on her door got progressively louder. It took a few seconds to get back her bearings, and she recollected last night's odyssey, hurriedly slipping on her nightgown that was laid across the chair.

Despite the central air-conditioning, she found the room temperature a tad unbearable and had decided to sleep naked, of course after making sure that the door was securely latched from inside.

'Coming! Give me a moment,' she said stumbling towards the door. She unlatched it to face a brown face peering inside. Yes, it was Naga all right, but he looked different in the natural morning light.

God, it is so difficult to recognize faces. All of them look alike.

'Good morning, rise and shine, it's 8:30.'

'Thanks Naga, give me a few minutes, and I will be right with you,' she said tightly holding on to her gown.

'Take your time. I am in no hurry. I took a week off to be at your service. By the way, I am preparing breakfast; hope you are okay with toast and eggs. You can taste Dravidian food later.'

'Thank you, be right there.'

Twenty minutes later, sitting at the kitchen table, she was staring at a burnt toast and a blobby omelet, hesitating to dig her fork in.

What is this stuff?

'Sorry, about the bread, the toaster is old, never used it much.'

‘My maid in Corea always burns my breakfast, I am used to it,’ she replied, almost choking on the salty piece of battered egg.

‘You have a maidservant? But I thought your parents are university professors,’ he said surprised.

‘Yes, they are. Everyone in Corea has at least 3 helps, one for cooking, another for cleaning the home, and the third for gardening, don’t you have any?’ she said hurriedly gulping down a glass of water.

‘Of course not, the only people who have servants here are the wealthy. As for gardening, most of us live in apartments, and only the superrich own their own villas.’

Maya was confused.

Dravida is a rich country, but the average citizens cannot afford servants and live in high-rise buildings, while Corea is a poor country, but almost everyone I know hires maids and lives in independent houses.

‘How much do you pay them?’ Naga inquired.

‘Well, in Dravidian rupees... let us see. 1,000 Corean won would be equal to around 10 US dollars, which is equal to around 100 Deccan rupees,’ she said, fingers punching the imaginary calculator. She suddenly stopped, as her eyes caught a gecko slowly inching towards the ceiling fan above.

‘That’s all? You know how much it costs to hire a maid here? 10,000 rupees. Isn’t that atrocious?’

Maya was half-listening. Tense, her eyes were following the four-inch long brown gecko that was chasing a small black spider.

What a disgusting creature.

‘Hey, don’t worry, balli’s are harmless, they just eat insects,’ he said, noticing her goose bumps and looking up.

‘What if it falls down?’

‘Not to worry, that rarely happens. Even if it does, make sure it does not fall on your head.’

Even before he could complete the sentence, Maya let out a loud shriek, and jumped out of her chair.

The gecko, in one last desperate attempt to catch it’s prey, lunged forward, missed the target, slipped and plopped on her right arm, before leaping onto the plate, and struggled to escape.

‘Help me. Get it out. Get it out,’ she screamed, rushing to a corner of the room.

He coolly folded a newspaper and chased the harmless little reptile till it disappeared behind the curtains.

‘You will get used to it. You know Dravida is a tropical country. Every home has ballis, without them we would be infested with insects, they do not bite and are not poisonous, so calm down.’

‘How can you live with those creepy creatures?’

‘There are a lot of superstitions about ballis, and we call it the Balli Dosha Shastram. Depending on which part of the body it falls on, it can either bring good luck or bad.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Well, if it falls on your head, something very inauspicious is going to happen, if it falls on the foot it means travel, and in front of you means bad luck. Every body

part it touches has a significance, different for men and women.’ ‘What about the right arm? It fell on my right arm.’

‘No idea, I never cared for all this humbug.’

Naga knew, but did not want to frighten her on the first day. He could not risk telling her that for women, it meant romance was in the air, while for men, it foretold trouble.

‘So, what is the plan? I thought of taking a few days to see the city before I start my research.’

‘Great. We are having lunch with some of my closest friends, and then we will go on a drive around the city. You can read some newspapers or watch TV, we still have an hour to go.’

‘Wow, how many newspapers do you read daily?’ she said, eyeing the stack on the coffee table.

‘I get 12 newspapers, 6 in English and 2 each in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Sinhala. All paid for by my office. You see reporters cannot afford to miss any news.’

‘How can you read all these newspapers before breakfast? I can hardly manage one. Do you really know all those languages?’

‘It takes practice to read so many. You learn how to spot the important articles and leave the rest. Also almost every Dravidian knows the five languages. English is our national language, but the others are also official languages. We have to learn at least two languages besides our mother-tongue and English in school.’

‘Isn’t it difficult?’ she said, recalling her efforts to learn English in school.

It was a nightmare, and here students have to learn three different languages apart from English?

‘Well, not really, because all the five languages are more or less similar in grammar construct and vocabulary. Only their scripts are different. Similar to Korean, Chinese and Japanese.’

‘I don’t think so. Japanese and Korean are similar grammatically but their vocabularies are very different. Mandarin and Cantonese are also different from the other two. Moreover, we are not forced to learn the languages in school.’

‘I am glad we are forced to learn our official languages. It makes us complete. Look at Hindustan, Hindi is both their national and official language although it is the mother tongue of only 40 percent of the population. So if your mother tongue is Hindi, there is no desire to learn any other language. The remaining 60 percent know only their mother tongue and are forced to learn Hindi. Very few know English, except in the NorthEast states. There are so many other beautiful languages, but no one cares. That is why they are underdeveloped.’

‘I think that’s a bit farfetched. Soviet Union faces a similar language situation, so does the European Union, and they are both developed. One does not have to make English a national language to become developed. That is the American conspiracy,’ Maya said.

‘I am sorry. Who said that Soviet Union is developed? All their economic data is manipulated. They only have military strength, which I also seriously doubt.’

‘Look, I don’t want to argue now. We can have this discussion later with concrete data.’

‘Suits me, I don’t want to quarrel with you on your first day here.’

‘It’s my second day, and you already did on the way from the airport,’ she reminded.

‘Hey, still upset? I told you I am touchy about my father.’

‘No, not that. It is just that I am really confused and in a new country. English is not my mother tongue, and you always misunderstand what I say. I am very stressed translating everything from Korean in my head before speaking. I hope you control your temper.’

‘I will try,’ Naga promised, walking towards his vibrating mobile phone that was being charged near the music system.

He looked at it and almost froze.

Shit. Big boss.

‘Who is it?’ Maya asked.

Putting a finger to his lips, he stammered: ‘Good morning sir... yes sir, I read the Deccan Herald and Island articles. I had the same document with me, but it is not genuine. A planted story sir, just to shake the markets... OK sir... I will try. I am on leave for a week, but will work on that angle from home... I have a guest from Corea... family friend... OK sir.’

‘Your boss?’ Maya guessed, as he put the phone in the holder.

‘Yes, my editor, he always calls up if I miss a story that appears in the rival newspapers. It was about some front-page articles that appeared in Deccan Herald and The Island. Corporate rivalry. I did not want to fall into their trap, and he understood.’

‘You report directly to your editor?’

‘No, actually I have to report to my bureau chief, but the editor has a personal interest in my stories. You see, his family group owns my newspaper, and is bidding for 3G mobile licenses later this year. Our rival newspapers carried a story on the issue.’

‘3G, you mean third generation? Wow! In Corea we all use landlines. Handphones are very expensive, and very few people can afford them.’

‘The cellphone market in Dravida is one of the most advanced in the world and boasts nearly 100 per cent coverage of its 270 million population. We have more cellphones than landlines now,’ he boasted.

‘Yes I read. I also know that your Internet speeds are the fastest in the world. I want to confess one thing. We still use dial-up Internet in Corea, that is why I could not use Skype.’

‘Is it? I thought you wanted to hide your face, anyway, good to know the real reason. Here, we can surf the Internet even on the road. We have free WIFI all over the city, it a new government initiative.’

‘Naga, can I get a temporary mobile phone. It is part of my research grant, but I want it soon. Can you help me?’

‘Sure why not, we will get it on the way to lunch with my friend Mathew and his wife. Everyone can get a connection in 20 minutes. Just don’t forget to get your passport along.’

‘Only 20 minutes? It takes two years to get a landline connection in Corea’. ‘I know. Just like Hindustan. I think we better start getting dressed, I don’t want to be late.’

‘Just give me an hour,’ she said, springing from the sofa.

#

Naga turned away from his sleek new iMac on hearing the door click, and noticed Maya emerging from her room. His study was just across the guest room.

He was stunned at the transformation. She looked different than in her travel clothes, actually exquisite, radiant in a red patterned short skirt and top. She wore hardly any makeup, except for a faint blush of lipstick, and her shiny smooth hair fell loosely on her shoulders. He had half a mind to squeeze her in his arms.

With a purse in the right hand, and a small package in her left, she walked up to him smiling. The familiar smell of ripe peach gently hit him.

‘That was fast. You took less than 2 hours,’ he quipped, staring at her.

‘Sorry, hope we are not late. I had to unpack and arrange my stuff. I got this for you,’ she said handing him the packet.

It was a leather wallet with the letters NP etched in the corner.

‘Thanks. How did you know I need a new wallet?’ he said, examining the insides.

‘Well, isn’t that the easiest practical gift to get a man?’

‘You look beautiful. Just give me a moment. Have to send an important email.’

‘Thanks. Work?’

‘No, it’s for you. Trying to setup some meetings with a few professors. We can meet them together and ask them some questions for a few story ideas, while you can do your research. There you go,’ he said, giving a final tap on the keyboard and getting up.

‘Why don’t you dress up, then we can go,’ she said.

‘What do you mean? I am dressed and ready!’

It looks so seventies.

‘Are you serious? Naga, before we go for my handphone, I think we should buy some clothes for you.’

‘What’s wrong with these clothes?’

‘Well, you look like an old Corean actor,’ she said laughing.

‘All right. All right. As you wish,’ he said, still not convinced that his clothes were old-fashioned.

‘Have you ever tried shaving your mustache?’

‘Why do you ask?’

‘You will look much younger, you should try it.’

‘Are you crazy? No one in Dravida shaves his mustache, it is a sign of manhood.’

‘You don’t need a mustache to prove your manhood, that is enough,’ she replied, looking down at the bulge in his pants.

Naga blushed and looked away.

She is flirting again.

Maya would not take no for an answer and kept pestering him until he finally relented.

A few minutes later, he came out of his room covering his lower face with his right palm.

‘Show me. Show me,’ she said, removing the palm. They were standing quite close to each other now, and she could almost feel his breath on her forehead.

‘It looks funny. People are going to laugh.’

‘It’s all in your head, you look handsome, it is also easier to kiss,’ she said.

Before he could think of an appropriate response, his mobile buzzed again. This time it was Mathew, calling to reconfirm the lunch appointment.

‘Let’s go’, he said, grabbing the car keys and switching on the security pod.

As the elevator descended, Maya once again looked transfixed at the scenery outside the glass enclosure. This time, the clear blue waters of the Bay of Bengal were swirling angrily in front. She could notice a few ships at a distance, and a lighthouse to her extreme right. Naga was standing behind her, stealing glances at her tight body.

‘Last night I saw buildings and lights here,’ she said.

‘That was the west wing, this is the east wing.’

‘Oh, so this building is on the beachfront.’

‘Sort of, we are in Royapuram, north Madras, it’s an older part of the city. The main beach is in central Madras, where that lighthouse is located. It is called Marina and is a distance away.’

‘I have heard of Marina Beach. Isn’t it the worlds second longest beach?’

‘Yes, it runs from near our Parliament to Besant Nagar in the south, a distance of 13 km. The average width of the beach is 300 m. It is also the most crowded beach in Dravida attracting about 30,000 daily visitors during weekdays and 50,000 during the weekends.’

‘Good, I hope to go swimming someday. I miss the sea, ever since my parents shifted to Pyongyang from Incheon’ she said.

‘If you want to swim I will have to take you to some other beach. Swimming is strictly forbidden on Marina. The sea is very rough.’

‘What’s the use of a beach if you cannot swim.’

‘We can’t help it, nature does not check for our convenience,’ he replied, clicking on the auto security key.

‘Mind your head, the car has a low roof.’

‘Which are the most popular cars in your country?’ he asked, putting the key in the ignition.

‘Pony, Tico and Pride,’ she said.

‘Sounds like a band. Never heard of them. Korean cars?’

‘Yes, Hyundai makes Pony. It is our first mass-produced car, now exported to Europe and South America. Tico is made by Daewoo and Pride by KIA, also Korean companies.’

‘So you don’t have any foreign cars?’

‘We do, but not everyone can afford them, very heavy import taxes.’

Import taxes? Every economics student knows it’s called customs duties.

‘I am sure, your fat politicians drive around in foreign cars, while the masses are stuck with Pony and Tico. So typical of socialist countries.’

Naga was right, she thought. But her ego was bruised, and she could not stand it.

‘For your information, we are a democracy. Have been since our country got united after war. So it is the people’s choice, and we don’t seem to mind. My country wants to be self-sufficient and develop local industries first.’

‘I have heard that before. You are just fooling yourself if you believe your mixed-economy system will help. Look at Dravida, we have always been an open economy, since independence, and see where we are.’

‘Every system has its own merits. I could argue that Dravida is just a lackey of USA. Your country is only a pawn in its larger imperialistic game. Moreover, if there is crisis in the US economy, your system will collapse. Too much interdependence is not always good. You saw what happened in 1997?’

‘Well, we have made systematic corrections now. It will not happen again. Moreover, the US had nothing to do with it,’ he said, referring the large-scale regulatory reforms that took place in the aftermath of the 1997 economic shock.

He vividly recalled, the ‘IMF Crisis’ that brought Dravida, at that time the world’s 11th largest economy, on the brink. He had just joined The Hindu newspaper as their staff correspondent.

Like other countries in the neighborhood, Dravida heavily relied on short-term foreign loans and was open to ‘hot money.’ When the private enterprises started struggling to meet their payment obligations, international currency markets panicked. Currency traders sought to convert their Dravidian rupees into dollars, and the currency plummeted. That made it harder for Dravida to pay its loans, and it made imports suddenly very expensive.

There were other underlying causes for the financial crisis, including over-investment in real estate and other speculative ventures. The IMF made loan arrangements to Dravida to meet its foreign debt payments on the condition that it adopts structural adjustment policies.

The danger of economic collapse forced it to swallow a tough bailout package that closed big banks and industrial companies and led millions of workers to be laid off.

As many as 125 large companies shut down, while unemployment skyrocketed from approximately 2 percent to over 10 percent.

‘IMF suicides’ became common among workers who lost their jobs and dignity. Desperate families in dire economic straits left their children at orphanages who were labeled ‘IMF orphans.’ IMF in Dravida became a symbol of every malaise that the country was going through, and literally became a catchphrase ‘I’M Fired.’

Thanks to the single-minded determination of its politicians and public, Dravida managed to pay back its loan from IMF in 2001, three years ahead of schedule. Within four to five years since the bailout, the economy was back on track.

‘We learnt a very good lesson, and it will not happen again. The problem with communist countries is that they are ideologically rigid and refuse to learn from their past mistakes.’

‘I told you Korea is not a communist country. We are certainly close to China, but we have our own economic system, and we are an independent country.’

‘If I wanted to insult you, I could have called Korea as China’s lackey, just like you did earlier. You do realize that Dravida is also an independent democratic country?’

Oops!

She smiled and deftly changed the subject.

‘Your streets are very wide and clean. You should see Pyongyang and Seoul.’

‘Yeah, I saw some pictures on the Internet. That is because of unplanned development and corruption. Your government never gave priority to infrastructure, and only concentrates on land reforms. You know the place where I stay used to be a nightmare before our independence. It had very bad roads, poor sanitation, infrastructural problems, traffic and congestion,’ he said. ‘However, our first President MGR gave priority to infrastructure and all the old areas of our major cities were entirely redeveloped.’

‘Wasn’t MGR an actor? All your Presidents so far are from the movie industry, right?’

‘Well not entirely true, our first two Presidents were actors: MGR and NTR. Our third president was not an actor – Jayewardene. This was followed by two other actors RaajKumar and Jaylalitha who is our present president.’

‘You have had five Presidents so far?’

‘Yes. In Dravida no one can serve for more than 2 five-year terms. We have two main political parties, the conservative DPF- Dravida Progressive Front and liberal DDP- Dravida Democratic Party. Only MGR and NTR, from DPF, could complete 2 terms, although NTR was President for 11 years, because of the 1993 war with Hindustan. Jayewardene and Raajkumar from DDP, again from DPF, lost after one term each,’ he noted.

‘So do you think Jayalalitha will complete 2 terms?’ she asked, avoiding his question.

‘Hard to say, she is a liberal who wants peace with Hindustan, but the conservative opposition is very strong and has a majority in the national assembly. Their possible candidates for the next elections are another actor, Rajanikanth, and a journalist Narsimhan Ram, whose family owns my newspaper. Actually, I personally prefer DPF. Why should we make peace with Hindustan? It has to be destroyed.’

‘How come you guys are so hung up on movie stars? They are just actors, who imitate real life on screen. Most of them are hollow.’

‘Hey, why this bias against actors? All our Presidents have done exceedingly well, and brought glory to our country. In fact they were all extremely popular in all four provinces, and responsible for my country’s development. Why don’t you

complain about the background of US Presidents? A majority of them were lawyers. Hey wait, they also had an actor President, Ronald Reagan.'

'You are right, occupations should not matter, but seriously, actors?' 'Films have a large and deep influence in our society. You will realize it during your stay here. I will take you to a couple of movies, and then you will appreciate the reasons.

There that is the Madras Port to our left, and straight ahead is India Bazaar and Parry's Corner.'

'India Bazaar?'

'Yes. It was set up in 1969, to help refugees who ran away from Hindustan during our Civil war. It was originally for Burmese refugees, but was expanded after the war. You get all Hindustani products and food here. There is also a small lane where you have very old restaurants serving Burmese noodle soup.'

'I heard the noodle soup is delicious.'

'How do you know? Lonely Planet?'

'No, my father told me, he was here for a couple of months during his masters.'

'Did he tell you about Corea Town?'

'No. Is there a Corea Town here?'

'Oh yes, there is. I have never been there, but have heard that there are many Korean restaurants for all the workers who come here.'

'Any idea how many Koreans work in Madras?'

'I don't know the exact number, but I can check and let you know. We have a permit system for workers from other countries who want to come here. I think Corea's quota is 2,000. Most of them work in the factories at Ambattur.'

'So Corea Town is located in Am-baa-toor?'

‘Yes. It is at some distance, but we can go on the weekend.’

‘Thanks. I want to buy some Korean food.’

‘Like kimchi?’

‘Yes, so you heard of kimchi.’

‘Look, there ahead is our Parliament building Sriramulu Sabha. It used to be called Fort St. George, and was renamed after our independence.’

‘You mean that used to be a fort?’

‘I’m sure you read about the East India Company and British rule in your history lessons at school. The Company built this fort in 1644, to secure its trade lines and commercial interests in the spice trade. It got its name because it was completed on St George’s Day. At that time there were just some fishing villages, but it soon became the hub of merchant activity and Madras developed around this fort.’

Maya hated history and did not recall anything about the East India Company or the British rule in India. Her history lessons only dwelt with Chinese and Japanese oppression of the Koreans.

Better pretend to know.

‘Who is it named after?’

‘Potti Sriramulu. When we were one country, he fought for the division of states on linguistic basis. He belongs to my province Andhra, where they speak Telugu. At that time, we were still a part of Madras, and he fasted until death demanding a separate state.’

‘So he actually died and there were problems between people of different provinces in Dravida.’

‘Yes, but the civil war brought everyone together, to fight the common enemy Hindustan.’

‘So, what happens if every province wants a separate country now?’

‘It won’t happen. That is why we have the language policy that I mentioned earlier. There is no discrimination based on language, because everyone knows all the official languages. Also we have an unwritten rule that if our President is from one province, the Vice President is from a different. All political power is equally divided between the provinces,’ he said, wiping the sweat that was pouring down his forehead.

Although Naga begged to switch on the air conditioner, she wanted to experience the ‘sights and smells’ of Madras, seated comfortably in the car.

‘I heard one part wants to separate. Tangana?’

‘Telengana. Yes, they do, but that is because they are encouraged and sponsored by the Hindustanis. The region was under Muslim rulers from the 14th century that is why Hindustanis consider them culturally closer, although they are genetically Dravidians. I personally feel they should be made a separate province within the country.’

‘I heard they want to join Hindustan.’

‘No that is just a minority, a few terrorists funded by our enemy. The majority speaks Telugu and want to remain in Dravida. We even had a referendum to prove it, just like in Sri Lanka, when they decided to join Dravida in 1980. Look at Hindustan, they are denying a referendum to Kashmiris,’ he said, referring to the border conflict with Pakistan.

Slightly confused, Maya nodded her head sideways.

‘So you don’t know about the conflict over Kashmir?’

‘I do. That is why I nodded my head.’

‘Ha. You got it wrong. Sideways nodding means no and vertical nodding means yes.’

She nodded her head up and down this time, laughing.

‘You know, head nodding is something that most Dravidians do. It is a sign of politeness, which is alien to the Hindustanis. They are crass with no original culture. I am sure, if we had not become an independent country, today the world would have considered their culture and food as representing all of us. No one would have heard of our rich heritage.’

‘What do you mean? I met a few Hindustani students at my university, they were loud but certainly not crass.’

‘Our culture is more authentic and was never corrupted by the invaders from Central Asia. Our music, dance, architecture and literature are pure, even our food and curries are original. If we had remained a part of India, our culture would have got contaminated. The outside world would never have known that we exist,’ he sighed and continued. ‘The world would have recognized their movies as ‘Indian movies’, maybe they would have called it Bollywood after Bombay. Their food would have been recognized as Indian food, their borrowed music would be known as Indian music. Tourists would have seen the Taj Mahal and returned in the belief that they have experienced true Indian culture. There is so much they would have missed.’

‘Of course not, if your culture were different, everyone would have appreciated it like they do today. Your carnatic music is a rage, so are Dollywood movies and the idli-dosa.’

‘You really think so? That is because our software engineers, financial experts and call centers are famous in all corners of the world. The Hindustanis would never have allowed that to happen, even though they now only export contract laborers to the rest of the world. If we were still one country, they would have been cultural imperialists. Just like how you communists accuse USA. Outsiders would have been clueless of the rich diversity. I really pity Bengal, Northeast, Orissa, Gujarat and Maharashtra for not joining Dravida, the Hindi imperialists have destroyed their culture.’

Maya let it go. Maybe he was right, maybe he was not, this was not the time to get into an argument, but Naga was in full flow and rambled on.

‘They have spent so much money trying to defend Kashmir, without even holding a referendum. Luckily, it is no longer our money that is being thrown down the drain. If we were one country, our region would have earned the majority revenues that the Hindi politicians use to line up their pockets, paying lip service to development.’

‘When will we reach Marina?’ she asked getting a whiff of sea breeze, and trying desperately to change course.

‘Nearly there, I will drop you off at the entrance and find a parking slot. Do not go far. Keep my mobile, just in case you get lost. I will take just ten minutes,’ he said, handing over his phone.

#

Standing on the sidewalk, Maya felt violated by the harsh rays of the sun. She was overprotective of her smooth complexion, but was afraid that her Korean cosmetics were not suited for Dravida’s harsh weather. To her horror, a few pimples had

already started pushing her forehead. It was 20 minutes since Naga left her, and she was growing impatient.

Why is it taking so long?

She stared at the road in front, as assorted fancy cars zipped by. Not used to seeing so many cars on the roads, it frightened her. She could spot a metro train rumbling on concrete slabs overhead at a distance, like a huge iron centipede. Across the road stood a majestic ancient red brick building, with the words 'University of Madras' on the steel signboard bouncing off the sunrays. Looking back she noticed a monument, with a huge beautifully laid out park in the center. An arch that looked like two converging elephant tusks adorned the entrance, and there was some kind of pillar like structure. To her right, was the long stretch of beach, and a few shops and restaurants cluttered the sides, the closest shade was the park. There was no option.

Unable to bear the heat any longer, she made her way towards the gigantic elephant tusks, all the while protecting her face with a newspaper that she had fortunately had the foresight to grab.

The park looked quite clean, and colorful with assorted flowers reaching for the sun. They had just been watered. There were plenty of benches under the shade of a massive banyan tree. The temperature seemed to have suddenly dropped by a few degrees as Maya approached.

She realized that this was some kind of a memorial.

Annadurai? Isn't it the name of the airport?

The pillar like structure had a flame burning at what looked like a small tomb. The park looked big and the signboard stated that it was laid over an area of about 510

hectares, featured a small safari park, a nocturnal animal house, an aquarium and a museum.

A few couples were whispering in hushed tones, some even locked in a tight embrace, unmindful of the world.

What a contrast to Corea, where couples of the opposite sex were discouraged from showing their affection in public. In fact an organization called 'Protect Korean Culture', even went around public parks threatening and humiliating unmarried couples, and youngsters in western attire, even as the cops looked on.

She chose a bench, which provided a clear view of the spot where Naga left her, aware that he would not be able to hear her shout.

A loud gong startled her. She turned around and spied an ancient clock on a weather beaten wooden stand. It was 12 'o clock.

Her stomach rumbled as she realized that it was lunchtime in Pyongyang. She had still not got used to the one o'clock lunchtime in Dravida. Unfolding the newspaper, and spreading it across her lap, she hoped for some interesting articles to read. It was today's edition of The Hindu.

What boring news. Nothing makes sense.

She flipped through the pages and sighed, folding it again.

'Waiting for someone?' a shaky voice called out.

Seated on the bench in front was a thin old man, leaning on his walking stick giving her a crooked wrinkled smile.

'Yes. My friend is just parking his car right now.'

'Impossible to get parking here now, it is a working day. Where are you from? Japan?'

‘No. Korea.’

‘Corea? Oh, wonderful country. I have been to Seoul many times, taught a semester at Seoul National University. I used to teach at Madras University, retired 10 years ago.’

‘Wow. What subject did you teach?’

‘Development Economics. Where do you study? Madras University?’

‘No sir. Corea University. I am doing my Ph.D, and came here for research.’

‘Ummm... in Pyongyang? I know a professor from there. He was my student here a long time ago, just when the Civil war broke out. You remind me of him.’

‘Don’t all Coreans look the same to you? Most Dravidians do to me.’

‘Ha, ha, you are right. Anyway, what is your research on?’

‘Contradictions in capitalist societies born out of civil war.’

‘That is interesting. I actually wrote a paper on it 20 years back. It may need updating.’

‘Sir, can I have a copy of it?’

‘It should be available in the University library. As I told you, I am retired now. I visit the library every afternoon between 1 and 4, maybe I can help you locate a copy.’

‘Thank you sir, I am sure it will be helpful. Hope I can discuss my research with you. Oh, there is Naga,’ she said spotting him on the sidewalk.

‘Sir, nice meeting you, I will come to the library,’ she said hurriedly, bowing her head deeply.

‘Naga! Naga!’ she shouted, turning around and running towards the sidewalk frantically waving the newspaper.

Noticing her, Naga waved his arms, gesticulating to hurry up.

‘Naga, you just won’t believe whom I met,’ she said, panting as she approached.

‘Sorry I am late. No parking spots. Maybe we have to come back later. Hurry, I just parked it on the shoulder,’ he cut her short. They rushed towards the car, just as a police patrol car slowed down behind them.

‘Sorry. Engine trouble. We are on our way,’ Naga told the cops, who waved and continued.

Maya just stared. If it were Corea, the cops would have definitely demanded a bribe before letting them go.

‘That was close,’ he said. ‘So who did you meet, another Corean?’

‘No, an economics professor who can help me in my research, he wrote a paper on my topic years ago. He also taught in Seoul.’

‘What’s his name?’

‘Uh-oh. I forgot to ask.’

‘Are you sure it was not someone hitting on you?’

‘A seventy year old man? I don’t think so,’ she laughed.

‘Then how will you find him? Want me to go and ask, if he is still around?’

‘No, that’s OK. He said he goes to the university library everyday between one and four. I am sure I will recognize him. Moreover, I don’t want to sit in the car alone. What if the cops come back?’

‘As you say. We can meet him on the way back from lunch. By the way, did you go to that memorial out there?’

‘No. I was waiting for you. Isn’t Annadurai your father of nation?’

‘We call him Anna, which also means elder brother. Yes, he is the father of my nation. When my dad was on the drafting committee of our constitution, he realized that the original Indian constitution did not permit any titles except educational and military ones, so he included a special provision. Although Hindustan claims that Gandhi is their father of nation, it is not constitutionally valid. That was the spot where Anna addressed all the students, and gave the first cry for Independence. As a mark of respect the eternal flame burns on the same spot.’

‘You mean Gandhi was never legally the father of nation?’

‘No, of course not, it is a myth perpetuated by the Hindustani school textbooks. After independence in 1965, Dravidians wanted a local father of nation and made sure that it is legally tenable. Globally, Anna may not be as popular as Gandhi, but he commands the same respect here,’ he said. ‘You know the irony? Gandhi is famous for his non-violence, and he is supposedly Hindustan’s father of nation, one of the most violent regimes in the world today.’

‘Naga. Can I meet anyone who fought in the Civil War?’

‘I will try, have to ask around. If my father were here, he would have been the best man to give you insights. You know, he arranged Anna’s meeting here that night. Let’s ask the old man you met today. Hey, time to go now. Mathew must be waiting.’

Chapter 4: DAZED AND CONFUSED

Moon woke up with a jolt as he felt something crawling up his right arm. It felt light and soft with small sticky paws. He narrowed his gaze, to see a brown gecko staring right into his eyes. He shook his arm furiously, and gave a loud scream, as it jumped off and darted behind the closet.

As usual, he was sleeping on the floor of his friend's dormitory, still tired from the late night action on Marina Beach. The meeting ended at around 2 am, and he was exhausted. He looked around the room. It was 10 am already, and his friends had left for class.

Aigoo! Missed the first two classes.

He grabbed his shirt, closed the door and hurried to his own room down the corridor.

Surprisingly, the door to his room was slightly ajar. He peeked inside to find his roommate Vinay sitting on the bed, sweating profusely.

‘Hey, not well? Didn’t go to class?’

‘What do you mean? There won’t be any more classes. I saw you at Marina Beach with the other chinkies yesterday night. Don’t you know?’

‘Know what?’ Moon replied, not wanting to pick up a fight with him for using the derogatory word.

‘I told pitaji that I wanted to study in Delhi. Forced me to come here just because of that stupid scholarship, stingy old man. I hate these rakshash... dark low caste people,’ he mumbled to himself in Hindi.

‘Vinay. What should I know?’

‘You should pack your bags and go back to your country. That Anna fellow has asked everyone to boycott classes, both students and teachers. There will be violence, just like 4 months ago, the University will close.’

Moon was confused. He had heard of the violent agitation just before this term started, but everyone said it was resolved.

Last night, after Anna started speaking, he lost Professor Subbaiah in the surging crowds. No one was left to translate for him.

All he could make out was a lot shouting, jeering and whistling. Every time Anna spoke, the crowd hooted and raised their fists. It was as if they were hypnotized. MGR and the others spoke too, and got a similar reaction. Students burst crackers, played the drums and sang songs. A lot of policemen suddenly turned up and cordoned the area, but there was no violence. Moon imagined they were celebrating something. Maybe the new MGR movie that everyone on campus was talking about. He mentally made a note to watch it with his friends and left.

Have to find Professor Subbaiah now.

He got up and left a sobbing Vinay in the room without saying a word, darting towards the Economics Department on the University campus, unwashed and unbrushed, he had to find out what was happening.

It took him 20 minutes to finally reach. The hostel was situated in the new campus, while the Economics Department was in the old campus. The classrooms were empty and the staff room locked.

Where is everyone?

Spotting a few of his friends huddled together under a tree, he strode up to them and enquired, ‘What’s happening?’

‘No idea, no one is here. Even the professors are missing,’ Andy Varte replied.

‘Andy, here are your room keys. What do you mean missing?’

‘Everyone seems to have gone somewhere. We heard that there is a huge protest march. All the students and professors have gone to the fort.’

‘Then why are you sitting here? Let us go and find out.’

‘Why bother, enjoy the holiday man. Lets go to see a movie. I heard the new James Bond movie has just been released at Pilot Theatre,’ Andy said, as the others nodded in approval.

‘Goldfinger? I so want to see it. Sean Connery is my favorite actor. Can’t we go in the evening?’

‘No, the evening shows are always full. This is the best time.’

‘OK then, you guys go ahead. I have to find out what is happening here.’

#

As Moon approached Fort St. George, he heard loud chanting and shouting. Drums were beating, just like last night. As he drew closer, the noise became louder.

Students carrying red and black flags had blocked the road to the building, raising slogans. Fully armored police were guarding the entrance. There were a few water tankers around. Some students had stones in their fists others were holding hockey sticks and cycle chains. He noticed Professor Subbaiah standing at the far end talking to a few students, and rushed towards him.

‘Sir. Professor Subbaiah. Excuse me sir!’ he shouted.

‘What are you doing here?’

‘Sir, there were no classes. The university is empty. What is happening?’

‘You were there at the meeting last night. You should know. Don’t disturb me now. I am busy.’

‘Sir, I could not understand a word yesterday.’

‘Oh, sorry, I forgot. It is not safe, there is going to be violence here, meet me in my office after lunch, I will explain everything to you. They have cheated us!’

‘Who has cheated us?’ Moon asked, still trying to get some information.

‘Shastri and the Congress; they want to make Hindi the national language. We will not tolerate it. Now go. It is not safe,’ Subbaiah said pushing him away.

Shastri. Congress. Hindi. National language.

Nothing made sense. He hurried back to the university, hoping to find someone who could explain all this, impatient to wait another two hours.

Luckily, he spotted Professor Ganapathy seated in the shade on a bench in front of Senate Hall. He was supposed to teach his class a course in Development Economics next year, and they had only briefly been introduced at the fresher’s welcome party.

He gingerly walked up and excused himself. ‘Good morning, sir.’

‘Hello. Mr. Choi from Corea, right?’

‘Moon sir, my first name is Moon-kyu, and everyone here calls me Moon. Also my family name is pronounced Choi like in pay not like toy.’

‘Yes. I remember now. Subbaiah was mentioning you in the morning. He was worried about your food, and sought information on Chinese restaurants nearby.’

‘That is very kind of him to remember sir, what with all this action here now.’

‘Oh, that?’ he said pointing towards the noise ahead. ‘Don’t worry. It will last only a few days. We had the same situation four months ago, before you joined.

Nothing to worry about.’

‘What is happening, sir?’

‘It is all a political game. The anti-Hindi agitations are justified, but they are only helping some of our politicians to build their careers. They are taking the help of some popular movie stars to spread mistrust among Indians and sow hatred.’

‘I’m sorry sir, it is still confusing.’

‘No, no, no. I’m sorry. I forgot that you have no knowledge of India and this is your first time outside Korea, I will try to explain in a language that you can understand.’

‘Thank you sir.’

‘Let me see. How far back do you want me to go? OK, first some basic information,’ Ganapathy said, raising his index finger. ‘You know India was ruled by the British till 1947, right?’

‘Yes, just like we were ruled by the Japanese.’

‘The British were not as cruel as the Japanese, nevertheless, they did subdue our people. Many people forget that while the British gave orders to commit many atrocities, it were the Indians who worked for them that carried out these orders. In fact I would give more credit to the British for making India one entity. Before them, it was just a number of selfish princely states and of course the Mughal dynasty which controlled large parts of North India.’

Moon nodded his head. He had perfected the art.

‘Now, take Europe. There are so many different countries, with different languages and culture, but in recent years, they are talking of a Federation of Europe.’

Moon bowed his head respectfully. He recalled studying about the Treaty of Rome, signed by France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. It led to the creation of the European Economic Community in 1957.

‘Imagine that the European Federation expands to become one country, and includes dozens of other member states.’

‘That is not possible sir. They are so different from each other. They cannot even understand the others language, and they are constantly fighting. The two world wars were started by them.’

‘Exactly. India was in the same situation, till the British came. Only, now, there is no talk. It is a reality.’

‘I understand.’

‘So next, if Europe becomes one country, German is made the official national language and everyone is forced to learn it for national integration, do you think the others will keep quiet?’

‘Of course not, there are only around 56 million people in West Germany, the population of the other countries combined must be much more.’

‘True, there are 52 million people in UK, 50 million in Italy, 45 million in France and 30 million in Spain. None of them would have had any incentive to learn German. But now, if they do not know, they will be discriminated in their own country. They will be forced to learn a new language and follow a new culture, just because the biggest ethnic group in the new country will be Germans.’

Moon nodded.

‘Similarly, in India, out of the population of 440 million, only around 134 million speak Hindi as their mother tongue. That is just 30 percent of the population. If you add 23 million who speak Urdu, the Muslim’s language that is similar to Hindi, it becomes 36 percent.’

‘So you mean 74 percent of the Indian population does not speak Hindi or Urdu?’

‘Absolutely. Now, if you make Hindi the national language, the others have a legitimate right to be upset. They will be kept out of government jobs. They cannot write national competitive exams. They will be treated as inferior citizens in their own country.’

‘Yes sir, the same thing happened in Korea during Ilje sidae. In 1939, the Korean culture was quashed, and we were forced to speak Japanese, even take Japanese names. The use and study of Korean language, literature, and culture was banned.’

‘So you see, our central government, which is mostly made up of North Indians, wants to use the same methods that imperial Japan imposed on Korea. If they have their way, we might even have to convert our names, because they cannot pronounce it.’

‘I heard that there was some language issue, even before Independence. Is it something different?’ Moon interrupted.

‘No it is the same. Tamils began protesting against Hindi as early as 1938, during the time Japan was imposing Japanese on Koreans. The British had allowed for some devolution of powers in the Indian provinces. The Congress Party, which is ruling even now, made Hindi compulsory in schools. After protests, the order was withdrawn, but over the next ten years, they tried imposing Hindi many times, always unsuccessful.’

‘It seems like a reasonable agitation to me. Why are you against it now?’

‘As I told you, it has become a purely political issue. Before 1947 a popular leader Periyar convinced everyone that the South Indians should form their own nation and get independence from North Indian Aryans. The present leaders Anna and Karunanidhi have given a new twist to this demand saying that the Congress Party represents Brahmins seeking to impose Hindi, Hindu supremacy and caste hierarchies on our national identity. It is rubbish to bring caste into the equation. While they claim they are against the division of India, their actions show that they want to do just that.’

Moon had heard about the caste system in India, it was even mentioned in his history textbook in school. He was pretty sure that Professor Ganapathy was a Brahmin.

This is not the time to ask.

‘What happened in yesterday’s meeting?’

‘I was not there and have no clue. There is nothing in the newspapers, even Subbaiah did not mention anything to me in the morning. I came to give my lecture and saw the deserted campus.’

‘Professor Subbaiah was mentioning something about Shastri making Hindi the national language.’

‘Not again! Shastri promised us that English would continue to be an official language. He never breaks his promise and is a man of integrity, I don’t trust the DMK politicians; they must be spreading these rumors. Where did you meet Subbaiah?’

‘He is with students at the fort sir.’

‘Really, at the fort? Then it is more serious than I thought. Maybe there is some news on the radio, I have to talk to Damodaran in Delhi. Have to go home.’

Ganapathy sprang up from his seat and hurried towards the residence quarters, leaving the confused exchange student grappling with half-baked information behind.

I better go back to the hostel and ask Vinay, he must surely have more information. Why did he say I have to go back to Korea?

Hoping to find his roommate still around, he walked at a brisk pace, sweating profusely in the humid weather, reaching in less than 10 minutes.

Vinay was still sobbing and grunting in an alien language. He had just finished packing his bags.

‘Hello, where are you going?’ he asked, noticing the suitcase.

‘Home. Where else?’

‘Are you dropping out? It is only the beginning of the term.’

‘What is the use? Saala madrasis won’t allow us to study.’

‘Can you tell me what happened? I tried asking people, but there is no one in the university. Everyone has gone to the fort.’

‘Of course, no one wants to study, they only want to protest and eat idli-sambar, and what for? They do not want to learn Hindi. Ridiculous, it is our national language and they do not want to learn it.’

‘I heard that your Prime Minister gave his word that English will continue as the official language.’

‘Yes, he is a very weak man, a pygmy compared to Jawaharlal Nehru. A few stones are thrown and he backs down, I wish Indira was our Prime Minister.’

‘Who is Indira?’

‘Jawaharlal Nehru’s daughter; she is strong, smart and beautiful. Unlike Shastri, she has more guts to thrash these dark madrasis and put them in their place. She is Nehru’s blood, and should rightfully get the position.’

‘Vinay, if you hate the South Indians, why did you come here to study for your masters?’

‘No choice yaar, my dad is a kunjoos. Madras University gave me a full scholarship. I wanted to study in Delhi with all the other intellectuals, but he said I needed to experience different cultures. My foot.’

‘I heard that there are more intellectuals in South India, and there is also uncorrupted culture here, that is why I chose Madras University. I also had an admission offer from Delhi University.’

‘You chose this place over Delhi? Big mistake, my friend, these are all fake intellectuals from the backward caste.’

‘Anyway, what exactly is the situation here now?’

‘That Anna fellow said that Shastri is likely to make an announcement today. Hindi will be made the official language, and everyone has to learn the language if they want to be Indian. If they do not want to learn Hindi, then they can leave the country.’

‘That is very unfair.’

‘Unfair? This should have happened long ago, in 1947. More people speak Hindi in India than any other language. North Indians fought for our independence from Britain and sacrificed so many lives. South Indians did not do anything; they only wrote newspaper articles and hid behind their doors, folding their lungis.’

‘That can’t be true. I read that South Indians too fought against the British. Also, I am told that less than 40 percent of the population speaks Hindi.’

‘So what? We are the majority. Why should we make English the national language?’ Vinay retorted.

Realizing that he was speaking to a North Indian prejudiced beyond redemption, Naga got up. At least he had the information he was looking for, but there were still some gray areas.

‘What did Anna ask the students to do?’

‘Complete boycott of classes, continue the agitation that was suspended in March, and if Shastri makes the announcement, South Indian states will break away from India. Just like the American civil war, when the North and South almost broke up.’

‘Isn’t that a bit farfetched?’

‘It is, but don’t worry, North India can easily thrash the madrasis. My country will never be divided, the army will break their backs.’

‘What are you going to do?’

‘I am leaving by the 2 ‘O clock train. Good excuse to get away from this hot and dirty city. You should also pack your bags, there will be a lot of violence.’

‘I don’t have any money for my return ticket. The University is paying my fees, and will give me my dues at the end of the term.’

‘Bad luck. Why don’t you ask your professors for a way out of this mess?’

‘I will do that, and hope to see you again after all this is over.’

‘I hope not. I am going to study in Delhi. My father can easily get me transferred, he just has to bribe someone.’

‘And you are OK with that?’

‘That is how it works here, I have no choice. Hey, you want to have lunch with me? I still have time for my train.’

‘Not in the hostel mess. Is there any North Indian restaurant close by? I want to try the food you eat.’

‘Sure, there are some good places in Triplicane, not far. I often go there to see Hindi movies at Star Talkies. Do you know in this damn city, there are only two cinemas Midland and Star which screen Hindi movies?’

‘Maybe that is because no one understands the language?’

‘You don’t need to understand Hindi to appreciate the movies. Have you seen Dev Anand’s Guide? It was released a few months ago. Madrasis cannot make movies like that,’ he said, humming a popular tune from the movie.

‘I read the book, written by a South Indian. Anyway, how far away is it?’

‘Just 10 minutes by walk.’

They stepped out the hostel, and could hear loud chants coming from the direction of Fort.

‘Look at those useless fellows. Let’s go this way, there is a shortcut,’ Vinay smirked.

As they made their way through narrow, congested lanes, Moon kept quite, lost in thoughts.

Hope Professor Subbaiah comes to his office. He is my last hope to get out of here.

‘Moon, although we are roommates, we never spent time together. You never sleep in our room, any problem?’

‘No, just that I chat with my friends till late in the night, and don’t want to disturb you.’

‘Those Northeast guys, eh? They are fun fellows, always singing and dancing. They have no problem with Hindi, but they eat beef, which is very unholy,’ Vinay said, dodging a stray cow on the street to avoid touching it.

The next sight completely puzzled Moon.

Spotting a garbage dump near the road, Vinay suddenly stopped, tugged at a string from under his shirt, pulled it around his left ear, and unbuttoned his trouser. With a deep sigh, he then relieved himself.

Ghe Shiki.

‘Couldn’t stop the pressure,’ Vinay said sheepishly approaching him, wiping his hand on the trouser.

‘Why did you pull that string over the ear? What is it?’

‘It is the sacred thread. We call it Janeu. Only the Brahmins can wear it. I pulled it over my ear so it is not polluted. We are also not supposed to speak while doing it.’

‘Is it a North Indian thing?’

‘No. All Hindu Brahmins have to wear the Janeu. As per vedic rules, a brahmachari should wear one thread, married men should wear two threads and men whose parents have passed away should wear 3 threads.’

‘What does the thread stand for?’

‘Each thread has three strings tied in a knot. They denote the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Of course, different people have different interpretations.’

‘So if a man wears this thread he can be identified as a Brahmin?’

‘Right, it protects him from all the evil eyes of the lower castes. A Brahmin is the superior caste and was appointed by Brahma to rule over other lower castes. It is sad that everyone is attacking this ancient system, and they are introducing so many new laws. They are just jealous of our superiority.’

Moon understood that the caste system was a complex and outdated system that divided people on the basis of their occupation. He also read that the Indian government had outlawed this practice, but the people were not ready to let go. It was however the first time that he heard a defense of this system.

‘How do you know your God appointed Brahmins to rule?’

‘It is mentioned in the Vedas, our oldest sacred book written 1500 years before Jesus Christ was born. You can read it if you doubt me.’

‘Maybe it was written by Brahmins.’

‘Aren’t you a Buddhist?’ Vinay asked ignoring his statement.

‘No, I have no religion.’

‘What do you mean no religion? Everyone has a religion. I was born a Hindu and will die a Hindu.’

‘In Corea, no one cares what our parents religion is. Every individual has a right to choose his own faith.’

‘That is impossible.’

‘No. I am not lying.’

‘How can you have no religion? I don’t believe you.’

By now Moon was getting really exasperated, wanting to give him a tight slap, turn around and leave, but he was hungry and spotted a restaurant ahead.

So glad this guy is leaving town soon.

‘Is that the restaurant?’ he pointed ahead.

‘Wrong, this street is littered with idli-sambar and halal restaurants. Our place is just behind that building, the best vegetarian food in Madras. It is owned by a pure Brahmin from Allahabad, he is also a Sharma, belongs to my sub-caste.’

‘Vegetarian? I could do with some pork or beef.’

‘This is not England. You don’t get pork and beef here, tauba, tauba.’

‘What about chicken?’

‘Don’t worry it won’t be like that sambar you get in the mess. Brahmins are not supposed to eat non-vegetarian, I do not even eat onion and garlic. The food here is strictly made according to the Vedic traditions, very healthy and delicious. There is our restaurant.’

It was dingy and dark, mostly empty with just two other customers seated on a table, a shaggy young boy digging the dirt from his nails with a matchstick and a pot-bellied old man sitting at the counter.

They took a corner table, and without asking, Vinay shouted out an order to the boy, who returned immediately with some strange smelling dishes.

Seem like leftovers from yesterday.

‘No rice?’ Moon enquired.

‘No, we don’t eat rice. We eat roti. Rice makes you lazy and dimwitted, like all the madrasis. We eat wheat which keeps us strong and active.’

Moon cringed as he saw the food laid out in front. There was some brown fluffy pancake like stuff, a bowl with brown ttong which looked even more disgusting

than sambar, a lump of fried vegetables floating in oil, and a piece of raw mango stuck in gochujang. There was no way he could eat this.

I can even tolerate rice with sambar now, no wonder he is so fat and dumb. Shikya.

‘Oh, I completely forgot, Professor Subbaiah wanted to meet me in his office. I am sorry, I have to rush.’

‘Are you sure? Fine, I can finish everything. Just pay me your share; one rupee.’

Moon hurriedly placed a few coins on the table and fled. He made his way to the hostel mess, expecting to find it empty, with all the students protesting at fort.

Arriving, fifteen minutes later, he was surprised to find it buzzing with activity; even protesting students cannot avoid lunch breaks. Looking around for familiar faces, he was disappointed. Andy and his other friends were still out watching Goldfinger.

Moon chose a corner bench next to some local students who were arguing at the top of their voice. Relatively, it was the least noisy place in the entire room.

They gave a quick glance as he bowed his head and continued their discussion, ignoring him.

The rice and sambar tasted quite good today, and he actually enjoyed the taste. Maybe it was the rebound effect from the disgusting tin shed food that he just escaped. He silently finished his plate and fled again, this time to Professor Subbaiah’s office.

The door was not locked, but it was closed shut from inside. He put his ear close to the door, and heard a radio. Taking a moment, he knocked on it hard.

‘Professor Subbaiah?’

No response.

He tried again, knocking harder. This time there was a click and the door opened.

‘Hello, Moon, I was expecting you.’

‘Sir, is everything under control?’

‘Not yet, this is a historic moment, you are lucky to be able to witness everything firsthand, and will never forget it.’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘At 2.30 our Prime Minister is going to address the nation, and make an announcement that will impact the future of India as one country.’

‘Sir, can you explain?’

‘You have been here for a month now. I am sure you know the anti-Hindi agitation.’

‘I have the basic information, Professor Ganapathy gave me the background in the morning.’

‘Ganapathy? He may have omitted some basic facts which he disagrees with.’

‘He explained about the agitation, but said that some political parties are taking advantage of it by making it a caste issue.’

‘He always argues that with me, but it is a historic fact. Brahmins, who are a minority run the Congress party, yet control all the power in India. They have manipulated the system to push the majority out of power. Ours is a self-respect movement trying to put a stop to this oppression.’

‘Isn’t that different from the language issue?’

‘No, it is all connected. It is very simple. I can understand the North Indian’s wanting to make Hindi the national language, they want to get all the jobs and

benefits by keeping us out, but why do the Congress politicians from South India support this policy? It is all a Brahmin conspiracy.'

That is possible. English or French politicians would never support German as the national language of Europe.

'Maybe they are just following orders from their leaders.'

'Exactly. If they are just doing that, then they have no right to represent us, we need leaders who understand our concerns and are not bothered about what their bosses say. You know our chief minister is from Madras, but he is trying to force this issue.'

'I heard they promised to continue English as official language.'

'Yes that was the promise Shastri made us, but there are other powerful politicians in the Congress party who want to sideline him, and are using the Hindi issue to become popular in their own constituencies. Anna got information that they may announce a new policy starting next month.'

'Doesn't Shastri have the final say?'

'He is the most powerful man in India, but very simple and naïve, always in the shadow of Nehru who was a globally recognized statesman, the others can easily manipulate him, including Nehru's own daughter who thinks it is her divine right to be Prime Minister.'

'Isn't India a democracy, where the people vote to decide?'

'Yes, but because of illiteracy and poverty, it is a few powerful people who finally get to manipulate the end result and decide what is best for the rest of the country. They are using Hindi to weaken Shastri and gain control.'

‘Sir, excuse me, I just realized that you are using the family names for all North Indians, although you are against using family names.’

‘You are right, very sharp observation. In North India, everyone uses the family name to identify people, so unconsciously we also tend to use the family names when we refer to them. This is the kind of slimy cultural imperialism that I am against.’

‘What will happen if Shastri sticks to his promise?’

‘That is what we are waiting for.’

‘What if he backs down?’

‘We will relaunch our agitation; our party has already started discussions with other South Indian leaders for the future course of action. Although they did not join our movement earlier, we are convincing them this time,’ he said glancing at the clock.

‘You mean from the other states?’

‘Yes. Andhra, Mysore and Kerala. We should also be able to convince Pondicherry and Goa. If all of us agitate together, the other states like Bengal, Gujarat and Maharashtra may join. The Center will have no option but to keep English as the official language,’ Subbaiah said, turning the volume knob on his transistor.

.... you were just listening the afternoon news. This is All India Radio. The time is 2.30 pm. We regret to inform you that due to unavoidable circumstances the address to the nation by Prime Minister Shri Lal Bahadur Shastriji has been postponed. We will let to you know the rescheduled time after confirmation. Please stand by for our next program Krishi Darshan.

‘Something is not right, definitely wrong,’ Subbaiah said.

‘Maybe he will give his speech in the evening. In my country, our Prime Minister always gives a radio broadcast either early in the morning or evening.’

‘You are right, 2.30 is not the right time to address the nation. Somehow, I still have a feeling that something bad is happening, maybe Ganapathy knows. Where did you see him in the morning?’

‘He was near Senate Hall, and went home saying that he has to talk to someone in Delhi.’

‘I better go to his house.’

However, there was no need for that, as Ganapathy suddenly barged into the room, panting.

‘Subbaiah, Subbaiah, I have some news for you.’

‘Hello Ganapathy, I was just thinking of you.’

‘I talked to my brother-in-law, Damodaran, who works in the Ministry of Planning. You met him last summer.’

‘What did he say? Any news about the Hindi policy?’

‘Something even more shocking, there are rumors that Shastri will resign, and is going to submit his letter to President Radhakrishna today evening.’

‘What? Why?’

‘The Congress party has split; Indira Nehru has set up a rival party and has the support of 251 Congress MPs, only 110 are supporting Shastri. As you know, of the 494 seats, the Congress has 361, and it takes the support of only 247 MPs to form a government.’

‘What is the reason for this split?’

‘Hindi of course. The Indira coterie wants to make Hindi the national language which is opposed by Shastri.’

‘Wait, if I remember right, in the 1962 elections, there were around 96 Congress MPs from South India, 41 from Maharashtra, 22 from West Bengal, 16 from Gujarat... you mean some of non-Hindi MPs also want to impose Hindi?’

‘That is right.’

‘Shameful, truly shameful, they will do anything for power.’

‘Indira will be announced as the new Prime Minister today evening. She may make a statement about Hindi in her acceptance speech.’

‘Isn’t she a member of the Rajya Sabha? How can she become Prime Minister, she has never won an election?’

‘She doesn’t need to, the Constitution allows for our Prime Minister to be from the upper house. I am sure there will be many more Prime Ministers in the future, who are unelectable.’

‘Oh my God! If she announces that Hindi will become the sole national language there will be riots here, it will be worse than last time. Today’s demonstration was just a scare tactic, and we never expected this.’

‘Sir, should I go back to my country? Vinay was mentioning something about a civil war,’ Moon interrupted.

‘Who is Vinay?’

‘My roommate, he has decided to go back to his hometown in North India.’

‘Bullshit, we are all against another partition. You know India was already divided after independence. Millions died and it was traumatic. Once is enough, we love

our country as much as the North Indians, although, we do hate this obsession with Kashmir.'

'What if your leaders decide to fight for a separate country? Will you support them?'

Subbaiah kept quiet, as Ganapathy shrugged his shoulders.

No one knew what lay ahead.

Whatever happens, happens for the good.

Chapter 5: CLOSE ENCOUNTER

‘Hope your friends are cool guys,’ Maya said, seated comfortably, as Naga steered the car away from Anna Square, towards the Taj Coromandel, a five star hotel with the best choice of restaurants in the city.

‘Yes, Mathew is one of my oldest friends in Madras. We were together in MCC during our Bachelors, actually next-door neighbors in our hostel, Bishop Heber Hall,’ he said, suddenly diving into an impromptu song.

If you come to Tambaram, darling

Come to Heber Hall

Heber is a paradise, Fish Pond and all

Ulunthuvadai, Masalvadai anything you want

Mess bills as big as hills

Heber is our haunt...

‘What was that?’

‘Oh, I just became nostalgic. It was our song. Kind of like an anthem.’

‘MCC anthem?’

‘No, it was our Hall song. MCC stands for Madras Christian College, one of the oldest colleges in Asia, founded in 1837. It had four hostels or halls as they called it. Mathew and I were together in Heber Hall. It was almost like a small country with our own anthem, traditions and government. It is located in Tambaram, around 30 kilometers from here, I will take you there one day.’

‘How long ago was it?’

‘Almost sixteen years.’

‘Were you classmates?’

‘No, he did Political Science. I did Economics.’

I don’t know how we became such good friends. We have hardly anything in common. He is from Kerala, I am from Andhra, he is religious, I am not, he is smart, I am not, he is an extrovert, and I am not.

‘What about his wife? Was she too in the same college?’

‘Nope, he met Ruby in his Church.’

‘So both are practicing Christians?’

‘Not just Christians, both are from the same sub sect.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘They are Marthomites, belonging to the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, which broke away from the Malankara Church in 1842. The Malankara church earlier broke away from the Saint Thomas Christian community in 1653 when the Portuguese forcefully drew them into Latin Rite Catholicism. So actually, they trace their roots to the missionary activity of Thomas the Apostle.’

‘It is confusing. So are they Catholics or Christians?’

‘What do you mean Catholics or Christians? Catholics are Christians. In fact they were the original Christians in Europe, before they split up and reformed in the 16th century.’

‘Not so in Korea. Biblical Christians in Korea consider Catholicism a different religion, since it is built on different foundations and proposes different ways of salvation.’

‘Well, in that case, Marthomites are Anglican, which is protestant only in the most limited sense. Theologically and historically, Anglican Churches are Catholic.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘Of course, I am. The word Protestant is often loosely and to a large extent inaccurately applied to them. Many of them consider themselves protestant, but they are not fully so.’

‘You are a Hindu, right?’

‘No I am not, I do not have any religion, although, my government does not recognize my choice. My parents are Hindu, so my government says that I am automatically Hindu, which is ridiculous. Moreover, our cunning ancestors decided that even if you are an atheist, you remain a Hindu.’

‘In Corea, we do not need to have a religion. Although a majority are Buddhists, there are many Christians and Catholics, and I have no religion. It is not important for the government.’

‘You know, although my country is developed, the mindset is still very conservative, and some basic freedom is missing. Atheist rights are totally ignored.’

The first criticism of his own country. About time!

‘Hey, we were talking of Mathew and Ruby, your friends.’

‘Yeah, I got carried away. As I was saying, they met in Church, fell in love and got married.’

‘If she was from a different church would they have married?’

‘Why do you ask?’

‘I heard that in Dravida, inter-religious and inter-caste marriages are rare. In fact people from different provinces also do not marry.’

‘You are right. We are still very conservative that way, but nowadays many young people are rebelling. My mother does not care for all this.’

‘What about international marriages?’

‘Dravidians do not protest international marriages as much as they do inter-caste marriages.’

‘That is strange. It is just like in my country.’

‘What do you mean? You have no caste system.’

‘All Koreans believe that we are the only racially pure country in the world.’

‘Then how come you look like Chinese and Japanese?’

‘I am not talking of looks. Most South Asians look alike. In fact many Dravidians look like Hindustani’s. Are you the same?’

‘Of course not.’

‘Exactly. Koreans may look like Chinese or Japanese to you, but we are not the same. Race has served as a marker that strengthens our ethnic identity. We call it *danil minjok*, and believe we are ethnically homogeneous and racially distinctive, having pure blood.’

‘What do you mean pure blood?’

‘We are a pure race descended from a single ancestor.’

‘Adam and Eve? Don’t all Christians believe that?’

‘According to our mythology, our ancestor mother was a bear.’

‘What a joke.’

‘So your monkey and elephant Gods are fine, but our mythology is a joke?’

‘I’m sorry, continue.’

‘According to our history, thousands of years ago, Hwan-ung, the son of a divine God spirit came down to earth to build a new country there. Everyone prospered in the new country, but a bear and a great siberian tiger were jealous. They wanted to live like human beings. So they requested Hwan-ung to grant them their wish. After some thought, he told them that they could become human beings if they eat nothing but 20 garlic cloves and a bundle of mugwort while being secluded in their cave for 100 days without sunlight.’

‘Is that why you guys eat so much garlic?’

‘The tiger and the bear agreed to the conditions and returned to their mountain cave to begin their ordeal. After about 20 days had passed, the tiger became impatient and ran out to find food. The bear endured the hardship for 100 days and became a beautiful young woman. Hwan-ung married her, and she gave birth to a boy called Dangun, who became the first great ruler of Korea.’

‘Do you believe that all Koreans are descendants of Dangun?’

‘That is what all of us believe. We are different from Chinese and Japanese. To keep our race alive, we only marry other Koreans without mixing with other people.’

‘What happens if you mix with others?’

‘Anyone who mixes is considered impure, just like you guys have this belief about inter-caste marriages.’

‘It must have made sense thousands of years ago to protect the community, but it makes no sense today. It has now become more of a psychological defense mechanism. Hindustan is worse.’

Not again. Why does he have to always compare Dravida with Hindustan?

‘What do you mean?’

‘Marriage is a personal matter. The government does not interfere here, and actually has laws to protect people who want inter-caste marriages. Dowry is also banned, and strictly punishable. In Hindustan, the people are on their own, might is right.’

‘There must be some laws?’

‘What is the use? Laws are only as good as their implementation. They have banned the practice of sati, but it is still rampant.

‘What is sati?’

‘It is a Hindu funeral practice in which a recently widowed woman immolates herself on her husband’s funeral pyre. Most of the time the wife is forced by society to jump into the fire.’

So gross.

‘Isn’t that murder?’

‘It is, but Brahmin scholars have justified the practice, saying that it is included in the ancient Hindu scriptures as an act of peerless piety, and purges the couple of all accumulated sin. It guarantees their salvation and ensures their reunion in the next life.’

‘Does it happen in Dravida?’

‘No, the South Indian Hindus do not follow this practice. That is why I said the Hindustanis are savages.’

‘Why doesn’t the government do anything?’

‘By tolerating outdated religious practices, they can control their citizens and remain in power.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Hindustan is just a democracy in name. In actual fact it is run like a Kingdom. You can be leader only if you belong to the royal Nehru family. Their President is Sanjay Nehru, Indira Nehru’s son, who was Jawaharlal Nehru’s daughter.’

‘I know Jawaharlal Nehru. We have his statue near Pyongyang City Hall.’ ‘Yes, he was a great leader, a true global statesman, the problems started after his daughter took control.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘In 1971, after winning the war with Pakistan, she revised the Constitution to change Hindustan from a parliamentary democracy to a Presidential system, with one-party rule. Their state religion became Hinduism in order to pacify hardliners and crush the opposition. There were indications of her dictatorial streak even before partition, when she discarded her husbands name to cash in on her fathers popularity.’

‘You mean there are no opposition parties?’

‘No. The main opposition was a party called Jan Sangh who wanted Hindu laws, but they were outfoxed by Indira. The rest who wanted to revert back to a secular democracy were put in prison. They have many such camps for political prisoners in the Thar desert.’

‘I heard they have a parliament’

‘Just a rubber stamp. The ultimate authority rests with the President. She was able to pit the various sections of the country against each other, and used the threat of war with Pakistan and Dravida to remain in power.’

‘What about their elections?’

‘They conduct elections every 6 years to show the world, but irregularities, election fraud and the obstruction of political rivals is a common practice.’

‘That is not what I heard.’

‘I am not saying it, the United Nations and Amnesty International have documented this fact. Your country is a friend of Hindustan, so you don’t get to know the reality.’

Maybe Naga is right.

‘Isn’t that the Taj Hotel ahead?’

‘Yes it is. We have to hurry, Mathew and Ruby must be waiting,’ he said looking at his watch.

#

‘So what do you think of them?’ Naga asked as he pulled out of the parking lot, an hour later.

‘They were very sweet. I really liked Ruby.’

‘What about Mathew?’

‘He is a very funny guy. I did not get most of his jokes, only the one about your mustache was hilarious.’

‘He is funny all right, and his jokes are great, you just have to know him better to appreciate them. He reminds me of Chandler.’

‘Who is that?’

‘Chandler from Friends of course. Don’t tell me you never watched it on TV.’

‘We have only one government channel CBS. Remember? Corea is not developed like Dravida.’

‘Well, Friends is an American comedy, which ran for ten seasons and ended last year. It revolves around a group of 6 friends in Manhattan. Chandler is the funniest guy. His wise-cracks are hilarious.’

‘Where to now?’

‘Let us get your mobile phone.’

‘After that let us buy some clothes.’

‘You want some Dravidian silk saris?’

‘No, for you.’

‘Me? No way. I have enough already’

‘Please. I want to buy some clothes for you.’

‘You are stubborn. Let us go to Nungambakkam.’

Great, time for a makeover!

#

As they walked towards the University library, Maya marveled at the architecture. The pointed arches in granite and domes with octagonal base captivated her it was far removed from the grandiose soviet style buildings in Pyongyang. Everything was so understated, yet classy.

Naga went to the reception counter, while she admired the various wall paintings that were on display. He returned with two 'visitors tags' and motioned her to come.

'The librarian was no help, as she has no clue of a retired economics professor who visits here daily. This is a huge place with hundreds of daily visitors we have to find your man ourselves. Will you be able to recognize him?'

'Sure. I think I can.'

'Let's start with the newspapers and magazine reference section. We can then try the Economics section.'

'As you say.'

The library was almost empty, with just a few students in sight. In fact, all of them were there only to catch up on the latest newspapers and magazines. The rest of the library, including the economic section was eerily quiet. No one was interested in dusting old books.

No old man in sight. Guess all the students are busy in the canteen.

'Are you sure he comes here every afternoon?'

'That's what he told me.'

'He lied.'

'Why should he? He seemed genuinely helpful.'

'I don't know. Lots of old people have fantasies of East Asian girls.'

'Please stop it.'

'Just kidding, let's go, maybe he is still in the park. We can walk across the road.'

'You are right. He looked very old. Maybe he just dozed off in the shade.'

‘Hello young lady, you again,’ a weak voice stopped them in their tracks.

They turned around to find an old wrinkled man sitting on the bench just outside the library doors.

‘That’s him, Naga!’ Maya screamed.

‘No need to raise your voice, it’s very rude.’

‘Sorry. That is the old man I met at the park.’

‘You can call me Professor Ganapathy,’ the old man replied. ‘So you came looking for me?’

Naga strode up to him apologizing.

He looks very familiar. Have I met him before?

‘Sorry sir. My friend is just excited. This is her first time in this country. She is from Korea.’

‘I know, she told me. Very attractive, are you sure she is just your friend?’

‘Yes, I am just helping her. My name is Nagarjuna, I am a reporter for The Hindu,’ he replied.

‘The Hindu? Boring paper, I stopped reading it. Deccan Herald is better. Who is the editor now, after Ram joined politics?’

‘Mr. Venugopal is my editor. He is former editor Kasturi’s son.’

‘Yes, I know Kasturi, he was a fine editor. Ram made it a communist newspaper. I hope the younger generation improves the quality.’

‘Sir, many people praise my newspaper for its quality.’

‘Yes, I know. But it is always pro-establishment.’

‘That is not true. Ram was anti-establishment. He exposed so many corruption scandals against Jayalalitha.’

‘You are right. He was a fine journalist, but not such a good editor or politician. I heard he is planning a peace summit with Sanjay Nehru in Delhi. Maybe he wants the Nobel Peace Prize. I am definitely voting for Rajanikanth this time.’

‘Sir, I hope you can give me a copy of your article,’ Maya interjected, tired of all the negative talk.

‘Oh, yes. My article, I should warn you, it is very old, the circumstances have changed.’

‘I am interested in your opinion. Has it changed too?’

‘No, of course not, come, let us go to the library,’ he said, getting up.

‘Sir, when did you retire?’ Naga asked.

‘Ten years ago. Taught here for 30 years. Great memories. That is why I keep coming back everyday.’

‘You were here during the Great Protest?’

‘Of course. How can I forget?’

‘So you knew Professor Subbaiah?’

‘Who?’

‘Professor Subbaiah, who organized the students protests.’

‘No. I don’t remember anyone by that name.’

‘How can you have not heard of him? He is a very famous freedom fighter, and he was also Head of the Economics Department’.

‘Young man, don’t raise your voice, my memory is quite sharp, I never knew anyone by that name. Anna and MGR were the leaders of our freedom movement,’ he scolded. ‘I am not feeling well. Why don’t you kids leave me alone?’

‘Sir, your article...’ Maya protested.

‘You can check it yourself. Search for P. Ganapathy Iyer, ‘ he said, turning around and striding off, without as much as a glance back.

‘What’s wrong with him? What did I say?’

‘No idea, maybe he really doesn’t know your father.’

‘That can’t be. They must have been colleagues, it is really strange, nanagaru was in the university from ‘64 to ‘75, in the same department.’

#

‘It was not hard to find his article. Professor Ganapathy’s books took up an entire rack,’ Maya said, latching on the car seat belt.

‘Yes. He was quite prolific. I still don’t understand why he lied about not knowing my father. His bio clearly states that he joined the department in January ‘65 when my father was the head of department.’

‘He is old. You know how bad their memories can get. Maybe he has Alzheimer’s.’

‘No. I will definitely find out. I have to find out.’

‘Let us go back home Naga. I am tired and could do with a good nap.’

‘OK. I am tired too. Where did I see him before? He looks so familiar.’

‘Who?’

‘Professor Ganapathy.’

‘What do you mean? You have seen him before?’

‘Yes. I just don’t remember where.’

‘The same way he doesn’t remember your father,’ she laughed.

‘Maya, no jokes please, this is important.’

‘Why don’t you search for his background on the Internet?’

‘That is what I plan to do. I will also talk to some people in the university administration, they will be able to throw more light.’

‘I want to meet him again after reading his article. I may need some clarifications.’

‘Sure. You do that. Meet him alone, as he seems upset with me. In the meantime, I can also research his background, which you can crosscheck for me.’

#

Naga bombarded Google, while Maya took her much needed rest.

‘P.Ganapathy Iyer’ returned 1.4 million pages. After the first few, he gave up. Not a single relevant hit. Just a lot of links to some published articles and debates.

‘P.Ganapathy Iyer Madras University’ returned 96,000 pages and ‘P.Ganapathy Iyer Madras University Economics Department’ returned 94,000.

Not a single link to his detailed background. Google needs to upgrade its search algorithm.

He tried the Madras University website, still no luck, in desperation, he switched off the computer and grabbed a beer from the refrigerator.

Whatever happens, happens for the good.

The day had proved to be quite eventful, and he was happy that Maya was really beautiful. More importantly, she was intelligent and curious.

The only thing that bothered him was that she showed little to no romantic inclinations.

She had flirted in her emails before. So definitely I do stand a chance. I have to make the first move. Fast.

Chapter 6: THE FIRST SUPPER

Subbaiah was tired. It was nearly a week since Shastri had resigned, and Indira Nehru usurped his chair, however, there was still a deafening silence on the official language policy. The new government was busy finalizing the cabinet portfolios, and there was no time to be bothered with mundane language issues now that power was in hand.

Everyone was confused. Without a definite announcement, they could not protest, since English was still officially an associate language and Shastri's promise continued to hold.

Anna and the top leaders of DMK realized that there was more to it than meets the eye, Indira had outwitted them and held back deliberately. Everyone knew that with the change of guard, Hindi would inevitably become the sole national language, however, without specifics, there not much they could do. Students rejoined classes and everyone went about their daily work as if nothing had happened.

‘I am sure she is going make a surprise announcement, to catch us off-guard,’ Subbaiah said, standing in front of a roadside kiosk just opposite the university gates.

Every morning, after the first two classes, he met Ganapathy at the staff canteen for a cup of tea and idle chatter, but with the sun beating down mercilessly today, they decided to walk down to the entrance for soothing tender coconut water, the natural energy drink untouched by multinational companies like Coca Cola, who had slowly started spreading their tentacles in India. Both were of the opinion that the country was still not ready for fully owned foreign companies, but the

government allowed companies like Coca Cola to make miniscule investments and repatriate all their huge profits back home.

‘What is DMK planning to do?’ Ganapathy asked, sipping on his Ilaneer.

‘I don't know. I haven't got any orders from the headquarters. I heard that Anna has gone to Andhra and Mysore to talk to a few local leaders.’

‘Obviously not Congress leaders?’

‘Of course not, he is trying to form a coalition of opposition parties, to be prepared for a larger protest. Today he is meeting N. G Ranga, co-founder of Swantara Party in Hyderabad.’

The Swatantra Party founded by Chakravarti Rajagopalachari , fondly called Rajaji, and N. G. Ranga in August 1959, opposed the socialist policies of the Congress Party, strongly advocating free enterprise and free trade. It had gained a substantial chunk of votes in recent elections to emerge as the single largest opposition party in Parliament.

‘Do you think they will agree to support DMK? After all Rajaji himself wanted to impose Hindi here when he was Chief Minister of Madras in 1938.’

‘That is true, but that was when the British were ruling us. He has now changed his party and position. He assured Anna of his full support and has taken a strong anti-Hindi stand. Ranga just needs to ratify this decision, and if he is positive, then Andhra will join our protests.’

‘What about Mysore and Kerala?’

‘I'm sure Anna and the others will be talking to popular local leaders, even if it means having a dialog with the communist parties. EMS should be interested, he hates the Congress.’

Elamkulam Manakkal Sankaran Namboodiripad, popularly called EMS, was the first Chief Minister of Kerala. As the first non-Congress Chief Minister in India, he became the leader of the first democratically elected Communist government in the country on 5th April, 1957. His government was dismissed in 1959 by the Central Government, which invoked the controversial Article 356 of the Indian Constitution.

The immediate cause of the outbreak of the Liberation Struggle was the introduction of an Education Bill that could have had an impact on the administration of educational institutions financially aided by the government.

Massive rallies and demonstrations against the government took place throughout the state, spearheaded by the Catholic Church, which gave a perfect opportunity for Nehru to dismiss the government.

‘They are communists, ideologically opposing the Swantara party. Do you think they will come along?’

‘I am sure they will swallow their pride and do so, politics does make strange bedfellows. Moreover, do not forget that Indira was responsible for EMS’ dismissal as chief minister. He is surely itching to take revenge.’

‘Subbaiah, I need to go, have a class now. So your dinner invitation still holds?’

‘Sure, we will be expecting you and Vijaylaxmi at around 7.30, don't forget to bring your camera. No more classes for me today, I will spend some time in the library,’ he said tossing his empty coconut shell into a wicker basket.

#

‘Hello Moon, searching for something in particular?’ Subbaiah asked, noticing him struggling with the index cards at the library catalog section.

‘Yes sir, I wanted some Indian history books. I realized that unlike Koreans who are a single race, everyone here is so different, there are so many languages and people look completely different, but they all belong to one country. I really want to know your country’s history and understand how it became possible to unite so many different races.’

‘We have to thank the British for that.’

‘That is what Professor Ganapathy told me the other day, and I was curious.’

‘There is little doubt that without British rule, we would all have ended up being different countries, ruled by selfish kings. Do you know that we still give them regular income?’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘When Britain ceded its control over India, a large portion of the subcontinent was held by more than 565 princely states whose position and relation was determined by separate treaties. Most rulers surrendered their sovereignty in return for annual income, called privy purses, and other privileges.’

‘I thought India is a republic. Do they still receive an annual income from the government?’

‘India is a republic, but the royal families have a very strong political clout. It is time they ended this practice. There should be a law to abolish privy purses, and the official recognition of the titles, only then can we claim to be a true democracy.’

‘So were the Indians happy with the British rule?’

‘No, of course not, like any other imperial power, they too had their self-interest in mind and exploited us, but unknowingly ended up uniting us. Like a silver lining in a dark cloud.’

‘It is surprising to see you say anything nice about the British. In my country, we hate the Japanese for what they did to us for 35 years, although they too helped develop our infrastructure.’

‘I am aware, and guess that is the reason you got upset when I asked whether you had Japanese and Chinese friends. I can understand your anger with Japanese, but why the Chinese?’

‘Many of the Chinese kingdoms considered Korea as their tributaries and ill-treated us for centuries. Even today they claim that that large parts of our country actually belong to them.’

‘That was centuries ago, today your government has very friendly relations with Mao.’

‘It is just to reduce the influence of Japan in our region; we cannot do that by being close to America. Deep down, Koreans still do not trust the Chinese, even though our government has taken the political decision to strengthen our relationship. We all remember how China sent 300,000 soldiers in Chosŏn Chŏnjaeng, and supported Kim Il Sung.’

‘If the United Nations, led by Americans had not intervened, your country may have been ruled by Kim.’

‘Yes, and we would have once again become a tribute of China. Luckily, we managed to defeat the communists and unify our country once again.’

‘I remember, I was in London during the Korean war, your country used to be spelt with the letter K. We all thought that it would split up, just like Germany.’

‘Actually we were originally spelt with the letter C, but the Japanese changed it to stand ahead of us in the English alphabetic order. We just changed it back after the war.’

‘That's very interesting. If President Truman had listened to his advisors and sacked General MacArthur, your country would have been under communist rule, or we may also have been looking at two countries spelt with a K, instead of one.’

When the north led by Kim Il Sung invaded South in June 1950, starting the Korean War, General Douglas MacArthur was designated commander of the United Nations forces. He came up with a brilliant plan to attack the North's forces, which had captured most of the country except for the port city of Pusan making an amphibious assault at Incheon. Taken by surprise, the north had to retreat back to their side of the border. China intervened in their support, changing the whole game, and the war dragged on. By April 1951, the military situation had stabilized, and MacArthur had wanted to launch another attack on north, seeking to capture the entire territory, even willing to use nuclear weapons. President Truman's advisors wanted to relieve MacArthur of his commands fearing that he was growing domestically very popular, and unilaterally deciding the course of battle. MacArthur finally won the war using conventional methods in July 1953, reuniting the entire peninsula.

‘That is true sir, but the cost of the war was terrible. Our country was destroyed, and countless people lost their lives.’

‘That is what inevitably happens in a war. More civilians suffer than the warring armies and ringleaders.’

‘Is it true that India may also face a similar situation because of the language issue?’

‘I hope not, we are all trying for a peaceful solution. Everything depends on Anna's talks with the other leaders, and of course, most importantly our Prime Minister.’

‘I was told that you have a lady as new Prime Minister now, she must be the first woman leader in the entire world.’

‘That is not true; in 1960 Sirivamo Bandaranaike of Ceylone became the world's first female elected Prime Minister. Moreover Indira was never elected, she manipulated the system, using the accident of her birth to assume this position,’ he smirked.

‘What do you mean?’

‘In India, we have a bicameral parliament, with an upper house called Rajya Sabha, and a lower house Lok Sabha. The members of the Lok Sabha are elected by direct elections and of Rajya Sabha nominated by political parties. Indira was nominated only because she is Nehru's daughter.’

‘Is it legal?’

‘Yes it is legal, but not ethical, to become Prime Minister without fighting elections.’

‘What happens if she fights elections and wins?’

‘Then I take back my words, and I will respect her. Right now, however, her actions just show a lust for power, she wants to prove that she is as capable as Bandaranaike.’

‘Shouldn't you give her more time to prove herself?’

‘True, I am just emotional because I heard that she wants to impose Hindi on us.’

‘It is already one week, and there has been no announcement.’

‘I know, that is what is troubling us. She knew we would start protesting whenever they make the announcement. Maybe she wants to surprise us, I am sure it will happen soon.’

‘I forgot to ask you earlier. If there is violence, how can I go back to my country? The university will only give me a flight ticket at the end of the term.’

‘Don't worry, there will not be much violence, once all the southern states join us she will have to back down.’

‘I am worried that there will be a civil war. I have already been through one in my life, and cannot handle another in a foreign country.’

‘Don't worry Moon, I will take care of your problems, if the university does close suddenly, we will find a way out. You can stay with me if the situation becomes bad, we live in a big campus accommodation with more rooms than necessary.’

‘Thank you, sir, hope Mrs. Subbaiah does not mind.’

‘I am sure Malathi will not mind. Actually, why don't you come to my house for dinner tonight? You must be fed up of the mess food, and it will be an opportunity to introduce yourself.’

‘That is kind of you sir.’

‘Don't expect noodle soup or other eastern dishes. You can taste the local vegetarian food from my province, my wife is a very good cook, but she doesn't eat meat. I have also invited Ganapathy and his wife, my house number is A8, you can easily find it.’

‘OK Sir, I will be there at 6 'o clock.’

‘Six is too early, Malathi would not have started cooking by then.’

‘I am sorry, I forgot. In Corea, we have our dinner at 6 pm, I will come at eight.’

‘7.30 should be fine. If you feel bored you can come earlier, I can lend you some history books from my collection.’

#

Moon returned to his hostel, hoping to catch some rest, he would not miss much by skipping the class on Marxist Economic Theory. Das Kapital always put him to sleep, and he would manage something for the exams.

It was one week since he started sleeping on his own bed, and he never felt more satisfied. After Vinay made a hurried exit, he had mopped the entire room and got rid of the strange smell that was hanging in the air. No more sleeping on Andy’s floor. In fact now his friends spent most of their time in his den, chatting till late in the night. They even brought along their local drinks, converting his room into a secret bar.

Andy came from Nagaland, one of the Northeastern Indian states, with 90 percent Christian population. They loved to make their own liquor from rice and for his stay in Madras, he had packed a suitcase full of zutho bottles.

The first time Moon tasted zutho he immediately took a liking to it, it tasted just like makgeolli, which was his second favorite alcohol drink. The first was of course soju, as it had three times the strength, enabling him to get high faster for less.

Andy warned him to go slow on his zutho stash as the stock was fast depleting, but once alcohol started flowing, there was no stop.

At first Moon was surprised to find that hardly anyone drank alcohol in the University. The drinking culture was deeply ingrained in Korea and families even occasionally shared soju and makgeolli with the ladies and children joining in. Here, only the foreign exchange students had the occasional beer, while the

students from Northeast swigged their own local brew. Someone told him that Hindu's consider it a sin to drink alcohol, only Christians and the lower castes participated in this activity. Another puzzle, he would never understand.

Tonight they had planned to get high on zutho, and try some ganja that his friend had picked up from a shop near Madras Central station.

As he approached the room, he saw it slightly ajar and expected to find Andy over for an impromptu visit, instead, as he pushed it wider, the strange smell was back, much to his horror.

Shikya is back. Our plan is foiled, have to leave a note for Andy.

‘Hi, you returned? I thought you were going to Delhi,’ he said, staring at Vinay.

‘My father did not want to spend more money, he heard there was no agitation and sent me back.’

‘So then you will complete the term?’

‘Yes, I have no option. What have you done to this room? What are those bottles in the corner?’

‘Those are some herbal medicines that Andy got from his hometown.’

‘So many of them? What is that strange smell?’

Bloody fool, it is coming from you.

‘Maybe there’s a dead rat somewhere... I have to go and find Andy, he has my lecture notes.’

‘OK, see you for dinner. Want to go to Triplicane again?’

‘Sorry, I have a dinner meeting.’

‘With whom?’

‘Andy and other friends, we want to try out a new Chinese restaurant on Mount Road,’ he lied.

‘Chinese? I heard they eat snakes and dogs, how disgusting. What about you?’

‘What about me?’

‘Do you eat snakes and dogs?’

‘The meat is delicious, you should try it sometime. There are so many snakes and dogs here, if you want I can cook for you one day,’ he replied, determined to make Vinay uncomfortable.

Chinese believe that there are specific health benefits to be gained from eating snake, and it is also considered a male aphrodisiac, but it was not very popular in Korea. Dog meat soup was a different pot altogether, and considered a delicacy in his country.

‘How can you people eat dogs? They are man's best friends?’

‘The meat is tasty and healthy, much better than chicken or beef. I never complain about your food, so you have no right to judge my traditional food.’

‘Barbarians, I wonder how your Indian Queen tolerated the nasty food.’

‘What do you mean my Indian Queen?’

‘The priest at my family temple said that an Indian princess from my hometown went to your country 2,000 years ago and married your King. She became the first Queen of your country, so actually Koreans are half-Indian. That is why you are better looking than Chinese hee heee,’ he chuckled.

‘What a fantasy. Do you seriously think it is possible?’

‘Of course it is, it is also recorded in your oldest history book.’

‘I get it, you are talking of Queen Heo Hwang-ok, the first queen of Gaya Dynasty. For your information, the Samguk Yusa says that a princess travelled by boat from Ayutthaya in Thailand, not your hometown in India. She came to marry King Suro who ruled a small kingdom in Korea, not my entire country.’

‘There is a temple in my hometown which also mentions the queen, I am sure that she came from Ayodhya.’

‘Can you really believe that a princess from India had a dream and travelled thousands of kilometers across the seas to marry a person she never met. They had nothing in common, not even the food they ate, or the language they spoke, maybe she was just his concubine.’

‘I don't know; my priest told me and I believe him, a Brahmin knows everything.’

‘Then how come you do not seem to know anything?’

‘Believe what you want to. India has a 5,000 year old history and my ancestors conquered most of the world, including Korea.’

‘Typical arrogance, just like the Chinese. A country's greatness lies not in its history but with what its people make of the present.’

‘You will see soon, India will be a superpower under Indira. Anyway, I am tired, and have to take some rest, a bunch of madrasis sat next to me in the train, farting all night. Enjoy your Chinese food with the other chinkies and spare me the details when you get back.’

Relieved, Moon left to find Andy and share the bad news.

Our secret bar is closed.

#

Locating Professor Subbaiah's house was a breeze. As Moon stood at the frontdoor, he heard laughter filtering through the curtains and realized that the mood was pleasant.

It means there is still no news about the language policy; I hope the new Prime Minister never announces it.

He looked for a calling bell, and unable to locate it, knocked twice.

‘So here you are, hope there was no difficulty,’ Subbaiah said, opening the door.

‘Hello sir. Sorry I did not get a gift.’

‘That is not necessary, we do not have that custom here, make yourself comfortable.’

Moon noticed Ganapathy reclining on a cane chair, fiddling with a camera.

‘Hello professor.’

‘Hello young man. Everything fine?’

‘Yes sir.’

‘Do you know anything about cameras? Subbaiah wanted a few family photos taken.’

‘That is a Rolleiflex TLR, a very expensive German camera.’

‘Really? My wedding gift two years ago, my nephew clicked a few photos during my wedding, but I could never use it. I think around four more photos can be taken on this roll.’

‘My father has a Rolleiflex back home. It is a professional camera and I learnt how to use when I was a kid. The top lens is used to compose and focus the image, ground glass screen and the lower lens takes the photo.’

‘Good you can take some for us. Malathi, can both of you come out of the kitchen please?’ Subbaiah shouted out to his wife.

What's the matter?’ she asked coming out with Vijaylaxmi, Ganapathy's wife. ‘Oh, your Corean student has come?’

‘Moon this is my wife, and that is Mrs. Ganapathy.’

They both look like traditional housewives.

‘Hello mam's.’

‘Namaskaram, Subbaiahgaru told me about you,’ Malathi replied bringing her palms together.

She never addressed her husband by just the first name in front of strangers, and always added the honorific 'garu' at the end.

‘He will take our photo. You have always wanted to go to the studio, but Ganapathy offered to loan his camera,’ Subbaiah told her.

Moon turned over the camera in his hands, trying to make out if it was the same model that his father had. It was.

A couple of minutes later, he had taken three photographs in the same location below the huge painting that was hanging on the wall.

The first was of Subbaiah and Malathi, the second of Ganapathy and Vijayalaxmi, and the last one of all the four together.

‘You know it is very expensive to develop the photos, I will go to Guindy to the discount studio there, we should get the photos in one week,’ Ganapathy said.

‘One more photo can be taken in this roll, I think we should also have one of all the three men together,’ Subbaiah, said feeling sorry for Moon.

‘Malathi can you take one for us?’

‘I don't know how to operate it,’ she protested.

‘Moon will show you, you just have to keep the camera steady and click that button.’

A brief lesson later, she nervously clicked the camera, as the three stood together below the same painting- Subbaiah in the center, flanked by Ganapathy and Moon.

What an ugly painting.

‘Sir, whose painting is that?’

‘That one was my wedding gift from a student in Bombay. It is called Maiden Flight and the artist is someone called Hussain.’

‘Are you interested in art?’

‘No, I have no idea. My student said that someday it will be worth a lot of money. It was his guru dakshina. Hussain is apparently very popular, although I cannot understand what is so great about this painting.’

‘Subbaiah, just because you cannot understand it, does not mean it is junk. Everything in life has a hidden value, which we appreciate only after others like it,’ Ganapathy said laughing.

‘Like Malathi's cooking?’

‘Exactly! You may be bored of her cooking, but her sambar is out of this world. Why don't we have dinner? It is getting late, and Moon must be hungry.’

#

Moon enjoyed the dinner and was pleasantly surprised that Andhra food could be so spicy, yet tasty. Corean food was supposed to be one of the spiciest in the world, but clearly, tonight's food was far ahead.

It is the first time I have enjoyed Indian vegetarian food.

The dinner conversation was slightly boring for the ladies, and they retreated indoors, but all the three men were hooked. It centered on the civil rights movement in America, and the Nobel Peace Prize that had been awarded to Martin Luther King Jr. the previous year. They also speculated on the next recipient, which was to be announced in a couple of months time.

‘Isn't it strange that Gandhi was never awarded the prize?’ Ganapathy asked.

‘I am not surprised, it is decided by white people who don't care for the rest of the world. It is just a way to further Norway's foreign policy and economic interests.’

‘I wonder how long it will take before people from other developing countries are acknowledged?’

‘I will tell you. When we become economically strong, and the white race wants to sell their goods to us, or they want to change a government.’

‘Subbaiah, why are you so negative?’

‘Not negative, da. Speaking the truth, which is obvious. It is just like the Brahmins controlling India, or the North Indians getting all the opportunities in our country.’

‘Hey, I am a Brahmin, and you are the head of department. You control my career.’

‘Don't simplify the argument and look at the broad picture. You know I don't care for your caste, you are my friend.’

‘Then stop saying things that hurt me.’

‘OK, sorry, I just got carried away. It is so frustrating, this silence from Delhi.’

‘I don't think there will be any announcement.’

‘I hope not.’

Trying to change the uncomfortable conversation, Moon intervened.

‘Sir, why is there no Nobel Prize for Economics?’

‘Because economics is more of a philosophy and not an actual science,’ Subbaiah replied.

‘I disagree. Economics is a social science that analyzes production, distribution, and consumption. We try to explain how economic agents behave or interact and how economies work,’ Ganapathy juttled in.

‘That is true, but we cannot analyze the results in a lab. The Nobel prize is given for disciplines that show concrete results.’

The discussion became heated, but at least it steered clear of the caste system in India. They could not reach a consensus and finally had to be pulled away by their respective wives, as the clock ticked away.

Strolling back to the hostel, Moon hoped that Vinay was fast asleep, he just wanted to change his attire and dash over to Andys’.

‘So how was the Chinese food?’ Vinay asked as he entered the dark room.

‘Delicious. I thought you were asleep.’

‘I am trying to sleep. Have a tummy upset, ate too much dal.’

Dal had the capacity to induce farts at a phenomenal rate. A favorite dish of North Indian vegetarians, it was the secret to the huge belly and obnoxious smell that Vinay carried around.

‘Dal that ttong worse than sambar? Have to escape fast,’ Moon thought.

‘By the way, I heard Indira made some announcement on the radio tonight. I told you she should be the prime minster, she will take us to great heights, India will become a superpower,’ Vinay said.

‘Do you know what she said?’

‘No, I heard some students talking when I went to the mess. I wanted to ask them, but they were from the lower caste and I did not want to pollute myself. I asked a Tamil Brahmin on the way back from dinner, but he just glared at me.’

‘Too bad... hey, what happened to all the bottles? You threw them out?’

‘No, your friend Andy and some other chinkies were here to take all the herbal medicine.’

This time Moon decided he had to confront Vinay.

‘You do know that chinki is a racist word?’

‘Of course not, it is just a funny word for the Chinese and the Northerners. Everyone uses it, just like kaalia for Africans.’

‘Is everyone in North India like you?’

‘What do you mean?’

Racist, prejudiced and hollow inside.

‘Nothing,’ Moon said, ‘I’m going to meet Andy. Maybe he knows what the Prime Minister said.’

He was mistaken. Andy and friends were in a deep slumber having had a heady cocktail of zutho and ganja, strumming the guitar to their favorite Beatles' numbers, getting stoned. They even forgot to latch the door from inside.

Moon was not surprised with the trashy condition of the room.

At least it doesn't smell like Vinay.

He surveyed it, pushed the empty zutho bottles to a side with his legs, and slowly lay down next to two other friends on the floor. One other friend was sharing Andy's bed. All of them had a smile on their faces, dreaming of something exotic, no doubt.

I have to wait until morning to find out what the Prime Minister said. Even Professor Subbaiah seemed unaware of the announcement.

‘I wonder what is in store?’ he thought, as he tossed and turned, till his mind was clouded with dreams that he would hardly recollect the next day.

Chapter 7: BONDS OF LANGUAGE

Naga was frustrated. It was nearly a week since the library encounter, and he still could not recall where he had seen Ganapathy before. He made daily visits to the library and the Anna memorial with Maya but the old man was nowhere to be seen.

Meanwhile, Maya was adjusting well, spending a considerable time at the Madras Archives. She also met some professors at the Madras Institute of Development Studies and Madras School of Economics, who gave her valuable inputs. In the evenings, they met his other friends in the city. Mathew and Ruby remained her favorite couple, and she bonded well with them.

Naga and Maya had grown closer together over the past seven days, but nothing physical. He admired her, stealing glances of her curvaceous body, having passionate dreams every night. Each passing day, she looked more desirable but he was afraid to make the first move. His roommate would be back soon and time was running out.

Maya still found the local food unpalatable, although Naga had taken her to all the popular restaurants in the city. At home he tried cooking exotic dishes that turned out to be major flops. He realized she missed her home food and made a mental note to visit Corea Town soon.

Have been putting it off for too long.

Today was Monday and he had to return back to work after a week, having made plans to keep Maya busy till the evening. First, there was the conference on 'Dravidian Culture' organized by the Dravidian Institute of Technology, for which he had registered her participation. After that, Ruby promised to pick her up and go

shopping at Spencer's Plaza. By the time they finished, he would be ready to join them for dinner on Mount Road.

The conference was a sort of revelation for Maya. There were a lot of interesting presentations, and she hoped to take a deeper look at the seminar booklet later.

It was definitely a goldmine for her research, as she got a deep insight into various aspects of the Dravidian culture, and managed to meet a lot of professors to exchange notes. They were very helpful, but she suspected they were a little too biased against the so-called Aryans.

The underlying theme seemed to be that the Aryans arrived in North India somewhere from Iran and southern Russia at around 1500 BC and conquered the indigenous Dravidian people. They were ruthless, disregarded the local cultures, and began taking control over regions, pushing the local people southwards. The caste system was established during this period to subjugate the darker skinned Dravidians.

Almost all the participants agreed that the Hindu religious stories about the many wars between gods and the dark skinned demons actually referred to Aryans and Dravidians. As far as they were concerned, it was just one aspect of cultural imperialism that justified their civil war.

In fact, a professor from Kerala pointed out that some Hindu gods were Dravidian and other gods Aryan. In particular, Shiva is a Dravidian god and not a Vedic god because he is not prominent in the Rig Veda, the oldest Vedic text. Some hold that Shaivism is a South Indian religion and the Vedic religion is North Indian. He received the loudest applause.

In the afternoon session on languages, she learned that Aryan languages like Hindi had been heavily influenced by Sanskrit, unlike the Dravidian languages. Their ways of developing words and grammar are also different.

She was surprised to know that the Dravidian family of languages comprises 27 languages spread across the entire subcontinent, while she was under the impression that there were just four. But, what absolutely took her by shock was a presentation on the similarities between Dravidian and other world languages.

Professor Robert Cadwell from Harvard University hypothesized that Dravidian-Corean languages are a language family that links Tamil to Korean, the similarities were first noted by French missionaries who traveled between the two regions.

‘Some scholars believe Korean to be a language isolate. Others believe that the language and people from the South Pacific region are closely related to Dravidians. There is also linguistic, anthropological and archeological evidence that Korean may be connected to the Austronesian languages, but I tend to believe the theory that early Tamil people migrated to the Korean peninsula,’ he said.

As proof, he referred to the work by a Korean researcher, Kim Jung-nam, who founded the Korean Society of Tamil Studies and identified close to 500 cognates and about 60 phonological correspondence pairs between the languages.

‘Moreover, both the languages are grammatically similar, and in both the letter 'l' is interchangeable with 'r' and words cannot begin with them.’

That is interesting. How can Dravidian languages and Korean be interrelated?

She hurriedly opened the appendix attached to his presentation and was greeted with a list of similar words. Appā, Ammā, Eonni, Nuna, Nā, Nī, Tām, Aigu, Nāṅ ...it went on.

‘Tamil and Korean have the same syntactic characteristics: the word order subject-object-verb, postpositions instead of prepositions, no relative pronouns, modifiers in front of the head noun, copula and existential as two distinct grammatical parts of speech,’ Cadwell continued.

Maya decided to meet with the professor after the conference and have a lengthy chat. This was by far the most shocking news she had heard since arriving in Madras.

How come no ordinary Korean knows it? Everyone thinks it is related to Chinese, Japanese and Mongolian languages, some also believe that it is related to Turkish, but never Dravidian languages.

She lost her chance as Professor Cadwell rushed out after giving his presentation without even waiting for the customary question and answer session.

He will surely be here for the closing ceremony.

An hour later, as the valedictory speech was being wrapped up, she looked around trying to locate him again.

Not in sight.

She turned back, and sure enough, he was there in the back row engrossed in conversation. She jumped out of her seat and approached him, not wanting to lose him again, when a sharp familiar voice caught her ear.

‘Robert, the Aryans and Dravidians are part of the same culture, dividing them and placing them at odds with each other is just a mind game,’ the voice thundered.

Professor Ganapathy! When did he come here?

‘Excuse me sir. It's me Maya,’ she said, forgetting the Harvard professor in her excitement.

‘Young lady, can't you see I am busy?’ Ganapathy curtly replied, turning back to his neighbor. ‘I am meeting my dear friend after 10 years.’

Embarrassed, she stood silently on the side, and waited for him to finish the conversation.

‘Nineteenth century was the era of Europeans imperialism. Europeans thinkers of that time were dominated by a racial theory of man, interpreted primarily in terms of skin color,’ he continued. ‘The British promoted the theory of a light-skinned Aryan race ruling a dark Dravidian race.’

‘I beg to differ Ganapathy, Sanskrit and North Indian languages are relatives of the European languages, but the Dravidian languages are entirely different.’

‘Who said so? Dravidian languages have so many Sanskrit words. The European scholars always felt that the original speakers of any root Indo-European language must have been white. The British promoted religious, ethnic and cultural divisions among their colonies to keep us under control, unfortunately some of these policies were subsumed by the so called intellectuals.’

‘So you mean to say that the European scholars invented the concept of Aryan and Dravidian races?’

‘Exactly, the difference between them is not a racial division, the idea is the product of an unscientific and culturally biased thinking, which only looked at race through the narrow prism of color. Scientifically, the only three primary races are Caucasian, Mangolian and Negroid.’

‘I hope what you say is backed up by evidence, because all my research suggests otherwise.’

‘I am sure there will be evidence soon. I believe your university is undertaking a project to analyze 500,000 genetic markers across the genomes of 132 individuals from 25 diverse groups from 13 states.’

‘That is true, my colleague is collaborating with MIT and some Dravidian organizations, once the results come out we will know whether you are right. I know it is difficult to argue with you Ganapathy, but as always it has been a pleasure. I have to rush for a dinner meeting.’

‘So long Robert. Hope to see you again soon. Let me know the results of the project once they are analyzed.’

‘Sure will. One of my students will contact you, maybe we will invite you to Harvard for a lecture.’

‘So young lady, do I know you?’ Ganapathy said, turning towards Maya.

‘Sir, it is me. I met you on Marina Beach and the library?’

‘Oh yes, how could I forget such a beautiful face, I am sorry I am getting old. Why don't you meet me at the library tomorrow, I will get you my article.’

‘I have already read it, and have a few doubts that I wanted to discuss.’

‘OK, 3'O clock at the library... and don't come with that rude friend of yours from The Hindu.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ she replied.

I am sure Naga will be thrilled to know that I finally met him.

#

Streaming out of the conference hall, Maya noticed Ruby on a sofa, working on her laptop. She checked a few missed calls on her mobile, but when she tried to call up Naga to give him the news, there was no response.

Must be busy in a meeting.

‘Hi Ruby. I'm sorry I missed your calls. Hope you did not wait too long?’

‘Hey no problem, I had some work nearby and finished early. We just rescued a badly injured puppy.’

Ruby was a volunteer-leader at the 'Blue Cross', a non-governmental organization dedicated to preventing cruelty towards animals. Her boss, Captain Sundaram had started the organization a few years ago, and mostly relied on volunteers to help him out. With the help of his wife and children he ran the organization on meager resources. A staunch crusader against cruelty to animals, the former pilot managed to attract many educated young women like Ruby to spread awareness on animal welfare.

‘It is so sad how some people treat animals.’

‘Yes it is. The puppy that we rescued had been badly beaten and left to die. I hope he survives. We have evidence of the culprit on close circuit camera, the cops will be dealing with him soon.’

‘What will happen?’

‘He will get a two year prison term.’

‘Amazing. No one cares for animals in my country.’

‘We have very stringent rules for animal abusers. Our second President NTR loved animals and introduced some very tough laws,’ Ruby said closing her laptop.

‘In my country, there are no stray or abandoned dogs. If one is found on the roads, it is immediately taken home.’

‘That is good, but you said no one cares.’

‘Yes, they end up on the dining table.’

‘Oh my God!’

‘Dog soup is a traditional food in Korea for centuries. We call it bosingtan.’

‘How can people eat dogs?’

‘Not the pets, but dogs specially bred for their meat, although abandoned or lost pets are never spared. Actually many of the younger generation is against dog meat, but the older generation doesn't care. We are still a poor country and the income inequality is high, so free meat is always welcome.’

‘Have you ever tasted dog meat?’

‘I did as a child, but not any more. I cannot bear the thought as I have two Schnauzers at home. Koreans and Chinese believe that bosintang has medicinal properties and also increases stamina. Dog meat keeps ones body cool during the summer.’

‘I know it is rude to comment on other cultures, but don't you think it should be banned?’

‘I understand your feelings, especially since you work for animal welfare, but older Koreans don't differentiate between dogs, cows or pigs. We cannot ban dog meat without banning other meat. In any case, this concept of keeping pets for entertainment is a western concept, the Asian society has always kept animals for their food.’

‘Not any longer, but you are right, we tend to get upset with the dog eating cultures without realizing that cows, pigs and goats are also thinking animals. Why not ban animal killing altogether?’

‘Are you a vegetarian?’

‘No, I am not.’

‘Now isn't that a paradox? Many people who fight for animal rights are non-vegetarians. They do not mind eating animals for their own food. I think each individual should be free to decide what she wants to eat. The government has no role to play, and certainly the western society should not tell us which meat can be eaten and which not.’

‘You are right, the people who object to dog meat mostly come from countries where beef and pork are a standard diet. I don't mind vegetarians protesting against killing animals for food, but non-vegetarians complaining about dog meat are just hypocrites.’

‘You know Ruby, there is an argument that whales should not be killed because of their high intelligence, so the western world wants to ban whale hunting, without considering that it has been food for Northern European and the East Asian countries for generations. If that is the case, pigs also possess high intelligence, but they are routinely butchered and eaten. Why don't they demand a ban on eating pork?’

‘You may be right, but the western lobby is more powerful, that is how they got whale hunting banned in 1986. Moreover the issue is not as simple as you mentioned. Most whale species are getting extinct.’

‘Dogs are not extinct. I am sure they will succeed in imposing a global ban on dog meat, while continuing with beef and pork.’

‘Maya, I know it is an emotional issue. By the way, do you know that beef is banned in Hindustan because Hindu's worship the cow, but pork is allowed although Muslims consider it dirty.’

‘I heard there are a lot of Muslims and Christians in Hindustan, don't they protest?’

‘They did, but it is a Hindu nation, and no one cares for the minorities, especially Muslims, because the greatest enemy is Pakistan. Not so in Dravida, which is secular.’

‘So although you have majority Hindu's, you can eat beef here?’

‘Sure. We allow all types of meat, but their killing is heavily regulated. No one eats dogs or snakes, so they are not included in the laws.’

‘What exactly is the proportion of minorities in Dravida and Hindustan?’

‘Dravida has a population of 223 million, of which the Hindu population is roughly 83 percent, Muslims 11 percent and Christians 6 percent.’

‘What about Hindustan?’

‘Hindustan has almost four times our population, around 805 million. Hindus are 80 percent, Muslims 14 percent and Christians 2 percent. They also have other minor religions like Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists.’

‘So you mean to say that Hindustan has more number of Muslims and Christians in absolute terms?’

‘Yes, non-Hindus in Hindustan are around 165 million, which is almost equal to our total Hindu population.’

‘Yet they banned beef?’

‘That is the difference between a secular democracy and a dictatorship. By the way, want to taste beef curry tonight?’

‘Sure, Naga never told me. I always thought it was banned here because of the Hindus.’

‘I have an idea, why don't we go to a good beef restaurant run by a Keralite.’

‘From your province?’

‘Kerala is known for its beef dishes, we call it nadan curry, you will love it. First let’s take a taxi and do some shopping at Spencers'. We can wait for Naga, and Mathew said he would join us.’

‘Sounds like a good idea to me.’

The mobile suddenly buzzed in her handbag.

‘Sorry, I couldn't take your calls. I was in the library. Where are you now?’ Naga said.

‘At the conference, on the way to Spencers Plaza. I have some good news for you. Guess who I met?’

‘Ruby?’

‘Hey don't joke, you know she was supposed to pick me up and is here now. Professor Ganapathy!’

‘So the old man did not die?’

‘Of course not, I am meeting him again tomorrow.’

‘ I will be there soon, we can discuss it later, don't want to get fined for talking while driving.’

‘Just one more thing. Did you know that Coreans originally came from Dravida?’

‘Impossible, we are a completely different race.’

‘Wait till you hear what I just heard. Don't be late.’

‘I too have some interesting news to share.’

#

‘I never knew that beef curry could be so tasty. I just loved it,’ Maya said, settling down on the sofa at home. Ruby and Mathew had just left after a cup of coffee.

‘We tend to make curries of everything. The Kerala beef curry is unique. In the west, they just make beefsteaks, but here we have different ways of optimizing their taste,’ Naga replied.

‘In Corea we also normally grill the marinated meat. Bulgogi is one of the most popular dishes among foreigners.’

‘You mean white folk. Dravidians do not have the concept of grilling meat, we always need to have curry with rice. That is why I said we cannot be the same race.’

‘I explained to you at the restaurant, it has nothing to do with the color of our skin or looks. The evolution of our languages clearly show that there was a mixing of blood sometime in the past.’

‘It is a theory that was abandoned years ago.’

‘I heard they are doing some genome project at Harvard. Professor Ganapathy's friend will send him the results, and then you can have the proof, I somehow believe it.’

‘Lets wait for the results then.’

‘Fine. Hey, what about that interesting news that you wanted to share. Why couldn't you tell it in front of Ruby and Mathew?’

‘I had my reasons. Want a drink? I feel like a scotch.’

‘I could do with some white wine.’

‘As you wish’, Naga said moving towards his small bar. A few minutes later, he was back with the drinks trolley.

He poured her drink and headed towards the bookshelves next to the television. From a hidden compartment near the bottom of the one on the right, Maya watched as he pulled out a small package wrapped in a plastic sheet. Without saying a word, he sat next to her and carefully started unwrapping it.

‘What is that?’ she asked, taking a sip from her wine glass.

‘My father's memories,’ his eyes turned misty.

He separated the contents of the package- a small handwritten diary, a wristwatch, newspaper clippings and an old photograph.

Raising the old photo in his hand, he pushed it closer to her eyes. ‘Do you notice anything?’

Three young men standing below a huge painting hanging on the wall, the painting is ugly and makes no sense.

‘Is that your father in the middle? He looked a lot like you when he was young.’

‘Yes, you are right, my mother always says that I remind her of him. In fact she was the one who took this photograph.’

‘Where is she now?’

‘In Hyderabad, my hometown. She doesn't want to stay here with me as she blames Madras for my father's disappearance. She will only miss him more.’

‘We should visit Hyderabad someday.’

‘That is the plan next week. I have fixed some interviews for a story about the IT industry. Now take a closer look at the photograph, can you recognize anyone else?’

She squinted her eyes, stared at the photograph and gasped.

‘Isn't that Professor Ganapathy? He looks so young.’

‘Exactly. I cannot make out the other guy on his left. The face is a bit fuzzy.’

‘That's because the photo is worn out, it may be another professor.’

‘Could be, but he is quite short with light skin. I think he is Ganapathy's son.’

‘So he was lying, he knew your father.’

‘That's what I told you. His face seemed very familiar. I saw an old photograph of his during the civil war in my newspaper archives, that's when it hit me.’

‘If he was your father's friend, maybe your mother will know. Why don't you talk to her?’

‘I already did, but she doesn't remember anyone by that name. She is 72 years old, and her memory has started slipping.’

‘Then you have to show her the photograph once again. She will surely remember the face.’

‘I could easily scan it and send her an email, but her computer has conked out, too many viruses, damn Microsoft. Unless I personally go there and check, she won't call the service center.’

‘So, what will you do?’

‘Nothing, we have to wait till we go to Hyderabad. In the meantime you should try getting the information out of Ganapathy. There must be a reason he is behaving this way.’

‘Maybe he fell out with your father. At the conference, he kept saying that Arayans and Dravidians are the same race. If that was so, then the whole idea of a different nation based on race would not be justified. Wasn't that the whole basis for the civil war which our father fought for?’

‘It was, we are different races, and there is no doubt about that. He is just saying it because he is a leftist Iyer.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Tamil Brahmins can be broadly classified as Iyers and Iyengars, although there are more sub-divisions within these categories. Iyers worship Shiva while Iyengars worship Vishnu, two popular gods in Hindu mythology.’

‘What has that got to do with race?’

‘Patience. The two groups of Brahmins believe they were originally Indo-Aryans who came down to the south thousands of years ago and settled. For this reason, many of their rituals and legends are similar to North Indians, that is why they have an air of superiority.’

‘Why is Professor Ganapathy against this theory? He is a Brahmin.’

‘That is because he is a leftist. There is a section of our society that believes we are the same race and should therefore be united into one country again. Our present President belongs to this group, and they are trying to reconcile with Hindustan.’

‘Anyway, he had the same opinion 20 years ago in his article that I collected at the library.’

‘What does he say?’

‘You won't like it, he concludes that capitalist societies like Dravida will ultimately collapse because they were built on a false sense of identity. He analyzed the economic indicators of England, Dravida and Canada and found similarities.’

‘What kind of similarities?’

‘People's class has a major impact on their opportunities; and not everyone is free to pursue their goals. People with the most opportunities are usually those who have the most capital. Equal opportunity for everyone is just a myth.’

‘Typical communist argument. Our system protects individual's rights and liberties and everyone has an equal opportunity to reach their full potential. In socialist countries only the powerful have opportunities,’ Naga said.

‘He also pointed out that consumers in capitalist countries think they have a choice, but in reality they do not. The companies decide what will be produced and there is also larger income inequality.’

‘Wrong again. Companies will produce goods only if there is a demand for them. I can also assure you that income inequality is greater in the communist countries.’

‘His study has compared the economic indicators and found otherwise. He concludes that capitalist countries will have higher economic growth in the first two decades of independence, which will be followed by a slowdown. Canada and England, both strong capitalist countries, slowed down after two decades of independence.’

‘That hasn't happened in Dravida.’

‘You are right, but I do not think he will change his opinion. I intend to find that out tomorrow.’

‘What time do you meet him?’

‘Around three in the library, he specifically told me not to bring you along.’

‘I guess he is pissed that I saw through his lies. Maybe he recognized me, you said I look just like my father in the photograph. I will drop you and go back to work.’

‘What about the morning agenda?’

‘I have fixed up some meetings with a few Hindustan defectors. We will go together.’

‘You mean they immigrated from Hindustan and are settled here?’

‘That's right. Not immigrated, escaped. Ordinary citizens are not allowed a passport. Only party officials and a few businessmen can leave the country.’

‘You are joking, right?’

‘You wish. The usual strategy is to cross the border into Nepal, Tibet, Bangladesh or Burma before fleeing to a third country like Thailand. All the four countries are close allies of Delhi and refuse to grant them refugee status. If they are caught they are deported back to Hindustan where they face public execution or detention in political prisons in the Thar desert.’

‘What about Pakistan?’

‘No one dare go to Pakistan. There is a bitter war over Kashmir, and all Hindustani's are executed on the spot.’

‘Why does Thailand offer them refugee status?’

‘It has close historic relations with Dravida, since many of our ancient kingdoms had expanded to Southeast Asia. If the defectors manage to flee to Thailand they are officially classified as illegal immigrants, and the government deports them to my country after they serve their prison sentences.’

‘What happens after they come here?’

‘They are interrogated by our intelligence agency to ensure that they are genuine and not spies, and then sent to a resettlement center on the outskirts of Madras. They are thoroughly debriefed and given training to adjust to life here.’

‘How do they manage to live without money?’

‘The government initially helps them.’

‘Does Hindustan have the same facilities for Dravidian defectors?’

‘Who would want to defect to Hindustan? The government cannot even feed its own people. Do you know that 3 million people died last year because of famine, and they demanded food aid from us?’

‘I heard there are a few defectors living there...’

‘All of them were kidnapped by spies here, like my father. It is just a propaganda tool used by them to tell the world that Dravidians want to defect. No one knows what those so-called defectors are doing now. Probably in a prison.’

‘My Prime Minister visited Delhi last year, and they showed it on television. The country looked very developed with modern buildings and clean roads.’

‘It is the showcase capital, just to fool the outside world that they are developed. If you go beyond Delhi, you will be shocked.’

‘I hope my visa comes through. I can see for myself, how much is hype and how much reality. I planned to go to Delhi after returning back to Korea.’

‘You mentioned it before. I am sure you will not be able to see reality, because I heard no foreigner is allowed to go anywhere unaccompanied. You will always be followed by two minders, who will control what you see and whom you talk to.’

‘How do you know?’

‘Everyone knows that. A lot of visitors have written their accounts on their blogs with secret photos and videos of people in other towns. The defectors you meet tomorrow may convince you.’

‘OK then, I guess it is time to call it a day. The wine has gone to my head.’

‘So has the scotch, I will work for sometime, before turning in, have to complete an article. Goodnight.’

Maya was slightly tipsy as she closed the door to her room and stripped before heading to the bathroom. She had a very productive day, and learned quite a lot.

She admired her firm breasts and naked body in the mirror, feeling a strange excitement. She was growing sexually attracted towards Naga.

Having forced him to undergo a complete makeover, complete with a new wardrobe and a decent haircut, his sharp features now stood out. He certainly seemed more confident than a week ago, but remained a perfect gentleman and did not make any inappropriate moves. All his flirting emails were just bravado.

I look sexy and definitely younger. I am sure he is attracted and just waiting for the right moment. Let us see...should I try something tonight? No. Both of us are drunk. This has to be done when we are completely sober.

Feeling refreshed after a warm shower, she switched off the lights and quietly opened her door just a bit, to check on Naga.

He was sitting on his study table, pounding furiously on his computer, with an empty bottle of scotch to his side, while a thick cloud of cigarette smoke hung over his head.

She immediately closed the door and snuggled into her bed. It was no use jeopardizing the relationship so soon.

As she tossed and turned in bed, her mind kept wandering from Naga to Professor Ganapathy, and finally to her 3 year old son back home, before a deep sleep overtook her.

Chapter 8: THE FIRST SHOUT

Still half-asleep, Subbaiah picked up The Hindu from his front door and sat down on his reclining chair. It was 7 'O clock and the sun was just peeping out from the clouds.

Birds were chirping, and the morning dew still dripped from the grass on his small front lawn. Loud strains of Sri Venkateswara Suprabhatam emanated from the radio inside. Malathi had just finished her morning bath and was busy in the prayer room. He would have to wait for his morning cup of tea.

How many times have I told her to start her prayers after giving me my cup of tea.

He unfolded the front page of the newspaper and the bold headlines jolted him wide awake.

Hindi Declared National Language

PM Announces Constitutional Changes

With his heart in his mouth, Subbaiah read the full article.

The Official Languages Act was to be repealed and starting next month Hindi would be the primary official language. All government business would take place in Hindi. States where Hindi was not spoken will have to introduce a two-language formula, where all students will be forced to learn Hindi, apart from their mother-tongue. Hindi speaking states would have no such compulsion to learn another language. The All India Civil Services examination would be conducted in Hindi alone, so it was in the interest of everyone to master the language.

Apparently the speech was just ten minutes long and delivered in Hindi, a direct challenge. Furious, Subbaiah scanned over portions of the translated speech text.

A nation's strength ultimately consists in what it can do on its own, and not in what it can borrow from others....

For over a decade our brothers from Madras have been protesting the majority decision to make Hindi the sole official language. Before taking a decision, I have consulted with all political parties across the nation...

I have often said that I do not want to impose Hindi on anyone. Yet, in my concern for the future of our country, how can I ignore the fact that since the beginning of the British rule, English has been used to dominate and discriminate against us in social customs and in laws...

This is unquestioningly accepted and acquiesced in by all but a minuscule minority from Madras. By allowing English to be an associate language, we are depriving ourselves of a fuller emancipation and growth. We are merely exchanging one kind of bondage for another...

Whether the opponents of Hindi like it or not, they cannot escape their responsibility nor should they be denied its benefits...

We want to walk together and in step with all others, but some people are still hesitating. You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist...'

'Nonsense,' he shouted, crumpling the newspaper and flinging it on the ground.

'What happened?' Malathi asked, coming out with a cup of tea.

'Exactly what we feared,' he said pointing towards the crumpled newspaper.

She picked it up, glanced at the headlines and gave it back. It was easier to ask him for the details, she had not yet mastered the English language and was more comfortable in Telugu.

'So what do your leaders say?'

‘The reporter tried to get in touch with Anna and Karunanidhi, but they are away in Kerala, the others in party office refused to speak.’

‘What do you think will happen now?’

‘I don't know. She made the announcement late at night yesterday without any warning. My radio was switched off because of our dinner party.’

‘Subbaiah, Subbaiah, you heard the news? You have a phone call,’ it was Ganapathy, shouting from the neighboring patio.

‘Thanks, da. I will be right over, let me just put on my shirt,’ he shouted back.

A few minutes later, he was on the phone talking with Senthil.

‘What is your party going to do now?’ Ganapathy asked, as Subbaiah put down the receiver.

‘We have an urgent meeting at 8.30 in the party headquarters. Anna and Karunanidhi will be addressing us, they travelled overnight by car from Trivandrum and have reached Madras.’

‘You be careful, thalaivar. Think well before you decide anything.’

‘Don't worry. Indira deserves a fitting reply.’

‘So I assume there will be no work again.’

‘Damn right. You can safely stay indoors again till we fight for our rights.’

‘Hey, no need to be rude, don't take your anger out on me.’

‘I am sorry, da. You know how stressed out I am.’

#

Moon realized something was wrong when he saw Vinay packing his bags.

‘Again?’ he asked.

‘This time for good. Indira has finally made Hindi our national language,’ Vinay said, looking up.

‘So what did she announce?’

‘Read the newspaper on the table, I stole it from the mess.’

Going through the contents, Moon realized that the situation was very grim.

‘When is your train?’

‘I plan to go directly to the station and catch the first train going north. There will be a lot of violence and they may target North Indians.’

‘What do you think I should do?’

‘They won't hurt foreigners, maybe you should ask for the first flight out of here.’

‘I will, if our University office is open. I don't think there will be any classes today.’

‘Not just today, for a long time, my friend,’ Vinay said, letting out a silent fart.

‘I will wake up Andy and the guys, they have to know this,’ Moon turned around and walked out with the newspaper in hand, just as the deadly vapors grazed his neck.

As he walked down the corridor, he saw many students leaving with their bags. The exodus was not just restricted to North Indian students, but many from the south as well. They were all speaking in high-pitched voices and rushing away, almost as if they had seen a ghost.

Andy and his friends were still fast asleep, doors open. He banged on the study table repeatedly and shook them roughly.

‘Wake up guys. Wake up. Emergency.’

One by one they arose from their slumber.

‘What's up man?’ Andy asked rubbing his eyes.

‘The announcement has been made, Hindi is the national language.’

‘What?’ they all shouted in unison.

Moon thrust the newspaper towards them, as they read the newspaper article.

‘That’s unfair...it says that all the civil service exams will be in Hindi. What about us? How will students from Nagaland, Assam and Manipur get jobs?’ Andy said.

‘Isn't that the question Madras students were asking a few months ago? Why didn't you guys join the agitation then?’ Moon asked.

‘None of us bothered, we never expected the government to make the announcement.’

‘It has now. What is your plan?’

‘I guess we have to learn Hindi.’

‘Couldn't you protest?’

‘They won't listen to us. None of the powerful Congress leaders are from Northeast. There are many from Madras.’

‘As part of the country, shouldn't you guys demand equal rights?’

‘Look, Northeast is far away from Delhi, we have always been treated as outsiders, that is why we came here to study in Madras. At least no one passes snide remarks and bullies us here.’

‘So you mean to say that you guys will learn Hindi without any protest.’

‘If we have to survive, there is no option. I am sure there will be a quota of government jobs for us.’

‘I heard there will be protests here again, maybe if there are protests in your States too, the government may back down.’

‘That is not going to happen, we have to learn Hindi, it is after all the majority.’

‘You are speaking just like Vinay, he has packed his bags and is going back home.’

‘I think we too should do that, and stay away till things cool down.’

Moon just could not understand the passive approach of Andy and his other friends. They accepted whatever was dictated to them, even if it was unfair.

‘At least the Madras students have balls,’ he thought as he headed back to his room.

More students were streaming out with their luggage. At this rate the hostel would soon be empty.

What about the five other foreign exchange students? They are all in the same position as I am.

As far as he recalled there were students from Somalia, Ceylone, Iran, Japan and China. He was not aware of any other foreigner on campus.

He had casual acquaintance with Abdi from Somalia, Jegan from Ceylone and Reza from Iran, but had completely ignored the other two students, and was not bothered about their whereabouts.

Abdi was just coming back from the common bathroom, towel wrapped around his waist.

‘Hey Abdi.’

‘Hey man, what’s going on? Haven’t seen you around lately.’

‘Did you hear what's happening?’

‘That Hindi shit? Yes, man, heard it. Makes no difference to me, my flight is tonight.’

‘Where are you going?’

‘You didn't know? My admission to Yale came through.’

‘Congrats. Do you know where Jegan and Raza are?’

‘Jegan went home last week when there were protests. He hasn't returned. Reza should be around.’

‘Thanks man. All the best.’

Have to find Reza. Wonder what his plans are.

‘Hi Choi,’ a voice called out.

He turned around, it was that Chinese student accompanied by the Japanese guy.

‘Hi, how are you?’

‘You look worried.’

‘Yeah, the hostel may shut down and everyone is leaving.’

‘We know, that’s why we sought a transfer to Delhi University last week. I always knew there would be trouble, especially after hearing about the riots in January.’

‘So you are going to Delhi?’

‘Yes. Our professor advised us and gave a recommendation. He said there might not be any classes this year.’

‘Maybe I should ask Professor Subbaiah.’

‘South Indian? He will say there will be no problem. Our professor is from North India, even he is leaving for Delhi.’

‘No harm in asking. Thanks guys.’

‘We could have hung out together, you always ignored us,’ the Japanese student spoke.

Moon walked away without replying.

#

Subbaiah was tense. The meeting had not gone as smoothly as expected. Anna and Karunanidhi had a heated argument on the future course of action.

Anna wanted to stage peaceful protests across all the South Indian states. After talks with the other top opposition leaders in other states, he was confident that a united front would weaken Indira's resolve. Karunanidhi on the other hand was more agitated and wanted a violent rebuttal.

Finally a compromise was reached. If a week of peaceful protests did not work then they would advise the cadres to use strong-arm tactics against the government machinery. Essential services were not to be disrupted, as the public would be their main source of strength.

Subbaiah was once again asked to organize the students for a demonstration in front of Fort St. George, culminating with a march to Marina Beach, where Anna and the other leaders would address them at noon. It was already nine and he had to start preparations soon.

Subbaiah got some frowns when he pointed out that it would be impossible to gather the students at such a short notice. He requested for the 'MGR card' once again and promised the largest possible crowd, for a public meeting at 6 pm. His plan was that at this meeting, Anna could announce the demonstration schedule for the next day. Not just students, the entire city would support it.

After being put to a vote, they accepted his suggestion and asked Senthil to help him out.

The morning was spent meeting student representatives from colleges across the city, while Senthil made arrangements with MGR's manager. Confident that a good crowd would show up in the evening, he returned home for lunch.

He knocked on the door, and was surprised to find Moon opening it, a book in hand.

‘Hello, Moon, did Malathi invite you for lunch?’

‘No sir, I came unannounced to meet you, I need some advise.’

‘It is about the anti-Hindi demonstrations right?’ he asked, glancing at Malathi who had just come out of the kitchen.

‘Yes sir, everyone in the hostel is going back home. Even the other foreign students have made alternate arrangements. I don't know what to do.’

‘Don't worry, we will think of something. I hate talking on an empty stomach. Malathi is lunch ready?’

‘Yes it is. I made extra rice for Moon. He hasn't even had breakfast, and was searching for you all morning on campus.’

‘Sir, I didn't want to disturb, but I knew you always came home for lunch.

‘No problem, I have been busy all day in meetings, more about it later, let me wash first.’

Moon put down the book he was reading, and followed Malathi into the kitchen.

Despite her protests, he insisted on helping her lay the table, and by the time Subbaiah returned, they were ready to go.

‘What happened at your meeting?’ Malathi inquired.

‘It did not go very well. Anna and Karunanidhi have different ideas. Anyway, we will have a huge meeting on Marina Beach at six where they will announce the future course.’

‘I don't want to come, I hate these political meetings.’

‘As you wish, you can listen to songs on the radio. Moon you should come, it will be a good experience for you.’

‘Of course sir,’ he reluctantly replied, remembering the earlier boring meeting on Marina.

‘You were saying all the foreign students have also left?’

‘Not all, most of them. Some have got a transfer to Delhi University and one to Yale.’

‘Oh, I see. It is too late for you to transfer now, the deadline was last week one month after classes begin. Why didn't you tell me before?’

‘I did sir, you said there would be no problems here.’

‘Well, the situation has changed now, be prepared for the worst.’

‘What do you mean?’ Malathi intervened.

‘This time everyone in South India is going to protest. All the other parties in Andhra, Mysore and Kerala are supporting us.’

‘So there will be violence everywhere?’

‘No, not this time, we will have peaceful protests for one week and check the response.’

‘What if there is no response?’

‘There will be. Seeing us, other states may also join.’

‘What if they don't?’

‘Malathi, please relax, we have it all worked out. Anna has been in politics for decades, he knows how to push the buttons.’

‘I have a bad feeling about this. I told you to take that job in Andhra University.’

‘Please stop this negativity. Just like your mother,’ Subbaiah raised his voice, shutting her up.

‘Sir, what do I do if the hostel shuts down?’ Moon asked, diverting the heat.

‘Tolerate life if it drags you downhill. Whatever happens, happens for the good. You can stay here, as I mentioned earlier,’ he said looking at his wife for approval. She was still upset. ‘Remember, you will get only Malathi's cooking, you still have time to escape.’

This time she responded with a grin. ‘He loves my cooking, don't you, Moon?’

‘Yes, Maam. It is different from Corean food, but much better than all the restaurant food.’

‘That settles it then, you are staying here.’

‘What if the agitation drags on for weeks?’

‘In that case I can lend you some money and buy a flight ticket. You can return it after you are safely home.’

‘Thank you sir, I feel much better now, you and maa'm are very kind.’

‘Hey, don't mention it, it is our duty, you are like a son to us.’

‘Moon, you never mentioned what your parents do,’ Malathi asked.

‘My parents passed away during the April Revolution and I was raised by my uncle who owns a restaurant in Seoul.’

‘April revolution?’ Subbaiah asked.

‘I am sure you know of our first President Syngman Rhee?’

‘I do, he was the first elected President of south in 1948 and was once again appointed President after the war unified your country.’

‘We had a Presidential form of government like America and he was very autocratic and corrupt. He declared martial law and jailed many members of parliament to push through constitutional amendments to get reelected. He kept rigging elections and won for four terms in a row, but the students were against it and there were violent protests.’

‘Just like our anti-Hindi protests.’

‘I was not here in January sir, so I do not know, but the agitation in 1960 is known as the April Revolution. It was violently repressed.’

‘Your parents could not have been students?’

‘No, they were not, both my parents were not educated. They had a small provision store in Masan, close to Pusan city.’

‘Pusan...isn't it the same city where President Rhee ran away when forces from the north invaded during the war?’

‘Yes sir. Masan is around 35 kilometers from there. The spark for the April Revolution was ignited in my hometown. On March 15th, there were violent student demonstrations and the police started shooting at students. After nearly a month, a body was found on the beach, the authorities claimed that the death was due to drowning, but some protesters forced their way into the hospital and found that the school kid was badly injured with a grenade. When newspapers published the photo, it shocked people.’

‘Naturally.’

‘More than 40,000 residents, including my parents staged huge protests and clashed with police, who opened fire killing many.’

‘What a sad story, I am sorry’ Malathi said.

‘I am actually proud of my parents. After their death in the demonstration, Rhee had to resign and we had true democracy.’

‘It is now a parliamentary democracy like India, right?’

‘We call it the second republic. Rhee had made it a Presidential system to remain in power, but the system is not fit for a country like ours. We need a parliamentary democracy, where no one has absolute power.’

‘That is not entirely true. Even in a parliamentary system there are ways to get absolute power. Look at Indira, she has absolute power in India, moreover the US is a Presidential system, and there are always checks and balances,’ Subbaiah said.

‘Sir, are you against a parliamentary system? It has worked very well in the United Kingdom.’

‘All systems have their merits and demerits, but I feel a Presidential system is better. In India and Korea, there is a fusion of powers between the executive and the legislative branches, but its success will depend largely on reforms in the political and electoral systems. Otherwise we are in danger of having a very corrupt government and policy paralysis.’

‘Isn't a Presidential system more appropriate for homogenous countries like USA and not India where you have so many different cultures and languages?’ Moon asked.

‘Good point. Coreia is homogenous, and should have remained a Presidential system as it would have benefited your future growth. I am surprised that although America helped you in the war, your country chose a parliamentary system.’

‘Sir, as a result of the war, freedom returned, and with it there was also an increase in political activity, driven by leftist and student groups who were instrumental in overthrowing Rhee. So we are now trying to distance ourselves from America and follow the middle path. In the long run it will help us prosper.’

‘You know Keynes said that in the long run we are all dead.’

‘True, but our children will benefit.’

‘You plan to marry soon?’

‘My girlfriend is in Coreia and we plan to get married after I return from India.’

‘Good. Maybe we will visit you someday. Malathi has never gone abroad, and I have always been interested in East Asia.’

‘You are welcome sir.’

‘Well, now that lunch is over, I have to rush to the party office once again. A lot of arrangements have to be made. Why don't you go back to your hostel and take some rest? It will be a long night of activity.’

‘I will be there sir, but hope you will have time to translate what is being said.’

‘Do not worry. I will be somewhere near the stage.’

#

The sun was still beating down on the sand, when Moon arrived at Marina Beach.

A huge crowd had gathered at the same place where he had attended the first meeting. This time the crowd was four times larger and included not just students

but people from all walks of life. Many of them appeared to have travelled long distances, as he saw quite a few lorries ferrying people to the venue. Many of them looked like poor peasants from the hinterland.

A huge stage had been setup and the music blaring out of the loudspeakers was keeping everyone entertained. A couple of makeshift stalls had also been setup to provide drinking water and free food to all participants.

Traffic on the entire stretch of road along had come to a standstill as the crowd swelled and spilled over. The whole atmosphere was very festive with people shouting slogans and singing songs.

Moon had never seen such a big crowd in one place before. His parents had not taken him along for the April Revolution, and he had never participated in a protest movement before. If he had, he would have been prepared for what was likely to take place soon.

Thousands of policemen were keeping an eager watch on the crowd. They were fully armed with rifles and bamboo batons, standing in a combative position behind the stage. The crowd, however, seemed to ignore them. They were having the time of their life, waiting for their leaders to come and address them. Moreover, they had been told that Anna had given strict instructions to keep the meeting peaceful.

Professor Subbaiah said it would be a peaceful meeting. Why are there so many armed cops here?

It was nearing six, and the leaders had not yet arrived. Moon peered closely at the crowd near the stage but was still unable to locate Professor Subbaiah. He thought it best to go and stand near the stage so that he would have a better chance of bumping into him.

However, it was impossible to move an inch. The crowd was tightly packed and there was quite a distance to cover. No one was willing to give way, as everyone wanted to be closer to the stage.

Exasperated, he just stood staring at the stage, trying hard not to breath, since a powerful stench was hanging in the air, and it got worse as people raised their hands to shout slogans. Covering his nose with his hand, he tried to move a little further away, but was trapped between bodies of all sizes and shapes. There was no escape.

Instinctively, he put his palm on the back pocket of the trouser to feel his wallet, but had to suddenly jerk it away in pain.

‘Aigoo,’ he screamed.

He saw blood oozing out from a sharp cut on his index finger, and turned around to see a dark young man squeezing out through the crowd in a hurry.

Moon checked for his wallet again. It was missing. He had been warned of pickpockets in crowded places, but never imagined that he would fall victim.

Luckily, he had very little money on him, the only loss was his University Identity Card.

It can be easily replaced.

Sweating profusely, he stood still hoping for the event to start soon. Anna and the others had not yet arrived and Professor Subbaiah was nowhere to be seen.

He suddenly heard a huge roar, as he noticed a police officer walk onto the stage and make an announcement.

The crowd turned restive and many of them started shouting slogans, the cops behind the stage were now slowly inching forward. The officer kept shouting into

the microphone. He appeared to be giving orders, and his tone seemed unusually harsh.

The crowd was now getting agitated, many fists went up and people started angrily shouting slogans. Moon was slowly getting dragged along with the crowd, closer to the stage.

He watched in horror as the entire line of cops behind the stage now was marching in front, rifles lifted shoulder high.

They are going to shoot!

He tried escaping backwards, but the crowd would not allow it. Suddenly, he saw a couple of stones being hurled at the cops, the officer screamed something into the microphone, even as Moon tripped and fell, headfirst.

Luckily for him, the sand cushioned the fall. He protected his head with his hands and tried to lie still, but it was impossible, as he felt a few kicks at irregular intervals with more people stumbling on top. Gathering all his strength, he tried to get up again. It was futile. Piles of bodies just kept tripping around.

He could now smell pungent smoke and heard a stream of gunshots. His eyes were burning, and the smell nauseated him. Now the crowd was running back, as more people fell.

Moon was now lying underneath a pile of breathing bodies, all trying hard to get up and run away as fast as possible. He felt suffocated and the hot sand underneath him made it even more unbearable. He gasped for breath, as tears streamed down his cheeks. His energy started draining as he gasped for fresh air.

Within seconds he blacked out, as Professor Subbaiah's voice echoed in his ears: 'Tolerate life if it drags you downhill. Whatever happens, happens for the good.'

SCATTERED FATES RAM GARIKIPATI

Chapter 9: BEYOND ENEMY LIES

The Defectors Resettlement Colony was quite a distance away from the city, taking an hour's drive to reach from Royapuram, and by the time they arrived, Maya had drifted off to sleep in the car.

‘Maya, wake up. We have almost reached.’

‘How long was I asleep?’ she asked rubbing her eyes.

‘For around 30 minutes, your eyes closed as soon as we hit the expressway. There it is,’ Naga said pointing ahead.

The place seemed like a fortress, with heavily armed guards, high concrete walls topped by barbed wire and close circuit cameras.

Naga parked his car at the entrance and told Moon to wait in the car. He walked to the main gate and greeted the security guard. He was escorted to the visitor's section, where he had to register their names, provide identification proof and fill up a form.

Clutching two visitor tags, he came back to the car and handed one to Maya.

‘Hang this around your neck. Don't lose it, or we will get into trouble.’

He hopped into the car and this time drove right through the open gates. It was just the beginning. They had to pass through two other checkpoints, and then travel for nearly a kilometer on a deserted road sprinkled with soldiers, before they finally reached a huge brick building.

More formalities. They had to register once again and wait in the lobby. Shortly after, a middle-aged balding man carrying a file walked towards them.

‘Mr. Nagarjuna?’

‘Yes,’ Naga said standing up from his seat.

‘I’m Krishnamoorthy, senior researcher. I have been asked to assist you. Hope you write something about our efforts in The Hindu’

‘Nice meeting you, this is Maya, she is a research scholar from Korea.’

‘Glad to meet you both, come this way please.’

‘Sir why is there so much security here?’ Maya asked.

‘Last year we caught a few spies who were posing as defectors. They were sent here to kill the resident defectors and blowup this place.’

‘Where are they now?’

‘Dead. They consumed cyanide as soon as they were confronted.’

‘How many refugees stay at this facility?’

‘We can accommodate around 2500 people in a year, and 400 simultaneously. Right now there are only around a 100 refugees undergoing training, the rest have finished their course and have settled elsewhere.’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘You do know the government operates this support facility for newcomers from Hindustan to help them resettle in Dravidian society? Every year, around 4000 Hindustanis defect to Dravida, but they do not all come at the same time. They arrive individually or in small groups at different times, whenever they manage to escape.’

‘What happens after they are sent here?’ Maya asked taking down notes, as she walked.

‘We offer a three month resettlement course for social adjustment in our country. The ultimate objective is to instill confidence, narrow the cultural gap, and motivate them to achieve sustainable livelihoods in a new environment. We also have a team of psychologists and sociologists to watch over them.’

‘Is that necessary?’

‘Absolutely. The level of economic development is so different between both countries that they get a culture shock. The percapita income in Hindustan is only \$ 800, while in Dravida it is \$32,000.’

‘Even Corea has a percapita GDP of only \$3,000, but it was not such a big shock for me.’

‘Maya, we are not just talking of per capita GDP but also the quality of life. Millions of people die in Hindustan every year because they cannot afford food to eat and clothes to wear. Corea is a democracy, where at least the basic necessities are available,’ Naga intervened.

‘I heard that food rations, housing, healthcare, and education are offered free in Hindustan, and they have also abolished taxes.’

‘There is big difference between propaganda and reality. Maybe you will change your opinion after speaking to a few defectors,’ Krishnamoorthy said, swiping his card against the security bar, and unlocking the doors.

‘What happens after they finish training?’ Maya continued.

‘After the course, they get citizenship cards within two weeks so that they can apply for a passport. The government rents a small apartment for the defectors and gives them some cash and incentives for their employment, education and medical support.’

‘Do they adjust well after they go out in the society?’

‘Unfortunately, we have found that they take a long time to adjust to Dravidian society and its level of development, but we are constantly updating our training techniques.’

‘How many people have trained here so far?’

‘Today there are close to 1.2 million defectors living in Dravida. This Center was only established in 1985, so we have trained around 700,000 people.’

‘Where do these defectors stay? In Madras?’

‘No, they are all sent to different provinces. Each province has a yearly quota for accepting these defectors. Here, this is the cafeteria. I have arranged for a few defectors to come here in turns so you can talk to them.’

Krishnamoorthy went to the counter to order a few drinks and snacks, while they seated themselves at a table.

A few minutes later a young girl in her teens walked in. Krishnamoorthy approached her, exchanged a few words and then brought her to their table.

‘This is Kavita, she is 20 years old, and is from Basantpur in Bihar province. Her father died when she was just three. At that time Hindustan was in the grip of a famine which eventually killed three million people.’

‘Can she speak English?’ Maya asked.

‘Unfortunately she cannot. She knows only Maithili and a little Hindi. Don't worry I can translate for you,’ Krishnamoorthy said.

Her story touched Maya's heart, and brought tears to her eyes. She was not aware that conditions were so bad in Hindustan.

Kavita began by telling them about her childhood, when her mother was still alive. She recalled going up to the mountains and growing food without being seen. Her mother and sister did the farming and she would walk four hours to the market and help sell whatever they could grow. At times they even caught wild rabbits and fowl to sell.

When she was 12, her mother died, after a small cut in her foot led to a serious infection. There were no hospitals nearby and the closest was 200 kilometers away in the capital of the province. She and her sister had to survive on their own without any family or social support, looking out for wild animals, and surviving on tree bark and wild fruits. In the winter of 2002, they decided to escape with four other orphans, by crossing the freezing Koshi River in the dead of the night. Two girls were shot by the border patrol, but the rest managed to escape to Rajbiraj in Nepal. One of her friends had a relative in the village, who instead re-directed them to another Nepali family in Kathmandu who they said would put them up.

Their host lived in a small tin shed in the suburbs of the city. One portion of the shed was given to the three girls, and they realized to their horror that they were expected to provide sexual services to tourists. Their room was locked from the outside, and they received only food, no pay, and were forbidden from going out. It was like a dark prison with no means of escape. After 11 months Kavita's sister managed to escape, but there was a police raid and she and the other girl were deported back to Hindustan. They were imprisoned in a labor camp in Thar Desert, where they were forced to do hard labor, in unhygienic conditions. Many women died because of the harsh weather, and they would regularly dump bodies outside.

After 18 months Kavita had an unexpected visitor, her sister's boyfriend who had escaped to Dravida. He had hired a broker, located her and bribed the guards to let her go. She had to hike to the mountainous region of Tibet, then a land journey to

Burma then by boat and by foot in Thailand. The broker left her at the gates of the Dravidian Embassy, and she finally arrived in Madras. The whole deal cost her sister around \$15,000.

‘If Hindustan provides free food, education and medical care, why did she have to escape?’ Naga asked Maya, raising his eyebrows.

‘Madam, the free food, education and medical care are only for the privileged residents of Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta, while the remaining citizens are on their own. They have to work in farm cooperatives and government factories. Most of the young men prefer to join the army because they are at least assured of food. That is why Hindustan has the largest standing army in the world,’ Krishnamoorthy quipped, as Kavita got up folding her palms together and left.

‘How big is their army?’

‘The total armed forces strength is 7 million. For comparison, China has the next largest of 2.7 million. Hindustan has a military first policy, and they spend 30 percent of their GDP on defense. What is more, Soviet Union also has many bases in the country, as a counter to the American bases in Dravida.’

‘What is the military first policy?’

‘Hindustan prioritizes the armed forces in all affairs of state and allocates national resources to the army first. It dominates their political and economic system, serving as their guiding ideology.’

‘Do they really need to spend so much on their military?’

‘They have a very long and porous border, their main enemies are Pakistan and Dravida on either side. Besides, the border with friendly countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, China, Bhutan and Burma also need to be guarded to prevent

defections. Here comes our next guest. He ran away from the Hindustan army, maybe he can give you more details.'

Rakesh approached them smiling.

His tale was even more horrifying, and he had succeeded in defecting on his third attempt. He almost died a few times, after being caught, and was severely tortured in the prison camp in Nagpur.

Maya sat transfixed as he narrated his ordeals, life in Hindustan and his escape. She met two more defectors after him, who narrated their equally bad experience, sending a shudder down her spine.

She failed to understand how her country, a democracy, could maintain friendly relations with a regime that treated their citizens so brutally.

On the return journey, two hours later, Maya sat in silence as Naga cruised his car on the expressway, occasionally shaking her head in disapproval.

'Are you convinced now?'

'Seems unbelievable. How did Hindustan become a dictatorship? I heard it was a democracy even after the civil war.'

'Yes actually, it was a multi-party democracy for eight years after the civil war. Indira Nehru was the Prime Minister and her party won two straight elections, in 1967 after the civil war, and 1971 after the Bangladesh war.'

'What happened then?'

'There were many allegations that she won the 1971 elections by fraud, there were a lot of protests and satyagrahas, with students and labor unions leading the agitation which slowly spread across Hindustan. A court case was also slapped on

her for election fraud and use of state machinery for election purposes. The court found her guilty and banned her from contesting any elections for ten years.'

'She retaliated by becoming a dictator?'

'It was not that easy.'

'She was democrat at heart, being the daughter of Nehru, and wanted to resign. Others around her who feared losing power poisoned her mind.'

'What did they tell her?'

'They convinced her that she could democratically retain power by imposing internal emergency. They cited threats to national security from Pakistan and Dravida, in addition to challenges of drought and the oil crisis, which had crippled the economy. The strikes and protests were paralyzing policies and hurting the economy of the country greatly.'

'What is internal emergency?'

'Although Dravida drafted a new constitution, Hindustan continued to use the old one that was drafted under Nehru. Article 352 of their constitution, allowed the government to grant itself extraordinary powers and suspend democratic freedom to citizens. It allowed her to launch a massive crackdown on civil liberties and jail thousands of opponents. She rewrote the laws, completely bypassing parliament, and converted Hindustan to a single party rule modeled on the Soviet Union, with the help of Brezhnev.'

'It is not a communist country like Soviet Union. Is it?'

'They call themselves democratic socialists, but follow exactly the same communist party rules. At the top of the Congress Party is the Central Committee,

elected at party conferences. The committee in turn votes for a Presidium and Secretariat. The Chairman of the Presidium becomes the President of Hindustan.'

'She has managed to remain in control by always getting her nominees elected?'

'Yes. They still have a feudal mentality and a lot of it has to do with poverty and illiteracy. She also made Hinduism the national religion, polarizing the majority population in her favor. She is Nehru's daughter, and everyone believes she is entitled to absolute power.'

'Is that the reason her son is now the President?'

'After her assassination by bodyguards loyal to the banned Democratic Janata Party in 1984, her younger son took over.'

'Younger son?'

'Her elder son had a falling out. He studied in Europe and believes in the democratic traditions that his grandfather believed in. He stays in Italy with his wife and children.'

'You think he will come back if Sanjay Nehru dies?'

'Unlikely. Sanjay has a son who is being groomed to take over.'

'Like a family business?'

'Democratic socialist family business. Although, if Rajiv comes back from Italy, he may reintroduce democracy and there will be peace here.'

'You think that is likely.'

'I hope so, but it is difficult. We all know what happened to Gorbachev after he introduced glasnost in Soviet Union. The military did not allow him to continue as President, and have their own man as leader now.'

‘Anyway, today's meetings have really opened my eyes.’

‘That is why I arranged it. What time do you have to meet Professor Ganapathy?’

‘He said three. What is the time now?’

‘It is two. Let us have lunch and I will drop you off. You can stay in the library after the meeting. I have to show my face in office for a little while. Keep your mobile switched on.’

#

Professor Ganapathy was reading The Hindu in the reference section when Maya spotted him.

‘Good afternoon, sir.’

‘Hello there, I have been waiting for you.’

‘Thank you for remembering.’

‘Let us go outside, they demand complete silence in here.’

Grabbing his walking stick, he led her to a bench beneath a neem tree and motioned her to sit down besides him.

‘Did you read my article?’

‘Yes. Do you still believe your theory?’ she asked, ready to jot down notes.

‘What theory?’

‘That socialist countries will prosper in the long term and capitalist countries born out of civil war will collapse?’

‘Absolutely. History has shown it to be true.’

‘Not in the case of Dravida and Hindustan.’

‘Look, there is no hard and fast 20 or 30 year rule. It could take another decade, but certainly I see brighter prospects for Hindustan.’

‘Even if it is a dictatorship?’

‘Young lady, in a diverse country like Hindustan, where every section of society is pulling the country to their corner, it takes a dictatorship to restore order.’

‘Order can be restored democratically, like in Korea.’

‘Korea is a homogenous country with a unique culture and everyone speaks the same language. Hindustan is different, it has so many different cultures and languages mixed together.’

‘Sir, my country is not homogenous. We may believe to have pure blood and the same culture, but there are lot of serious regional imbalances especially among two regions, Honam and Yeongnam.’

‘The problem may be because of economic imbalances, and not due to cultural differences. I am talking of different races.’

‘Different races? Sir I thought you believed that there is no race difference in the subcontinent.’

‘Who told you?’

‘I overheard you arguing with Professor Cadwell at the conference.’

‘You misunderstood. I was saying that there is no difference between Aryans and Dravidians, I did not say that Hindustani's are purely Aryans. They also include Mongolians and a mix of the races.’

‘Dravida has no Mongolians. So is it a single race?’

‘That is true. Aryans and Dravidians are subsects of the same race and in Dravida we have only Aryans and Dravidians.’

‘Sir, it is a bit confusing.’

‘No, it is not if you stop believing the theory that Aryans conquered the Dravidians. The European historians confused our identity by dividing us into two distinct races, just on the basis of our skin color.’

‘What do you believe then?’

‘Not believe, I know. All the people on the subcontinent, including Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Ceylone are one race. We look a bit different, but genetically we are the same.’

‘So what does that mean?’

‘It means that there is no reason for each of these countries to oppose each other. We can all live together in one country and have a single identity.’

‘That is not possible sir. If you have your way, Korea, China and Japan should be one country.’

‘Ideally yes, but I know it is not practical. I was just saying that we should stop fighting against each other claiming we are different races.’

‘The division in today's world is not just about race, it is also because of power, culture, language and ideology.’

‘All are man-made divisions. That is why I appreciate the efforts in Europe, 15 diverse countries have formed the European Union.’

‘Do you think it will last? Soviet Union and its allies are still not part of the union although they are European.’

‘I hope they join. It will show the world that man-made differences do not matter, we can all grow together.’

‘Isn't that an ideal situation, which may never happen?’

‘Today it appears difficult, one never knows about tomorrow. I hope that South and East Asia also learn from the European Union. It will lead to global peace, if America does not intervene.’

‘Why does everyone blame America for all the problems in the world?’

‘They create all the problems in the world, meddling in other countries, where they should not.’

‘What about Soviet Union? They meddle more, but no one seems to mind.’

‘That is not true. Soviet Union intervenes only after America makes the first move.’

‘Sir, you know that is not true. You forget Hungary, Checkoslovakia and Afghanistan. They even intervened in India, before America came to the rescue of Dravida.’

‘No, that is not true, Soviet Union gave support to Hindustan military only because America was secretly giving support to Dravida. If America had not intervened, we would still be one country.’

‘You were against the civil war here?’

‘I have argued countless number of times about the futility of all this. The British did us a favor and made us one country. Certain politicians divided us, once on the basis of religion, and the second time for language.’

‘Sir, Dravida has developed quite well, and everyone is happy here.’

‘That is what the outside world thinks, but they do not know the internal divisions. There is a lot of social tension. Many people are rich, but the number of the poor is not small, and they feel marginalized. They may revolt with drastic consequences. People from Kerala think they have been discriminated, as we have not had a

President from their province, although we had a President from Ceylone, which joined Dravida only in 1980.'

'I have a few friends from Kerala. They did not seem upset with the situation here.'

'They must be middle class. The middle class only gives lip service to the real aspirations of the people who matter- the working class.'

'I think the middle class represents the real aspirations of society. They have always brought revolutions and changes across the world.'

'Ignorance. Ignorance. All revolutions have always been brought about by the working class and students.'

'Students who are middle class. Sir, are you a communist?'

'Don't call me that. They have been a disgrace to our movement. Marx was a great scholar. I am a democratic socialist.'

'Just like Hindustan?'

'You could say so.'

'Isn't it great that in Dravida, you have the freedom to tell people that you are a democratic socialist, but if you are in Hindustan and claim to be a capitalist, you could be sent to Thar or Nagpur?'

'Young lady, you are being rude.'

'I'm sorry sir, but I also thought like you before I met the defectors today.'

'You mean you went to Tambaram, the resettlement camp?'

'Yes, and I heard about their life in Hindustan.'

'They have all been brainwashed. Don't believe everything they say.'

‘Starved and tortured people cannot lie. At least here they have the dignity that they deserve.’

‘I have been on many delegations to Delhi and also lectured the students there. I did not see any starvation or torture. They seem like a happy prosperous country. Definitely poorer than Dravida, but it is a just and equal society.’

‘Did you visit other cities?’

‘Yes, they took us to Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Lucknow and Calcutta. Everyone seems content with what they have. The government provides free education and medical support to all citizens.’

‘You didn't travel alone?’

‘That was not possible, we went in a group and they helped us by providing tourist guides.’

‘Sir, why is it that there are more than a million defectors from Hindustan here, but no one goes the other way?’

‘Our world has become materialistic, and this consumerism has been driven by the imperialists American companies. No one is bothered about simple life and basic necessities anymore.’

‘Given a chance, would you go and stay in Hindustan?’

‘I am too old for that now. Although I wish we were one country, India, again. A truly democratic socialist nation.’

‘What if you were younger?’

‘I definitely would.’

‘Then why didn't you? You were young when the civil war took place.’

‘Yes I was. I wanted to go, but Vijaylaxmi was expecting, and Subbaiah stopped me.’

He just mentioned Naga's dad, have to be careful, he doesn't realize it yet.

‘Vijaylaxmi?’

‘My wife. She was pregnant. She passed away last year. I really miss her.’

‘How many children do you have sir?’

‘Two. A son who is an economist at IMF in New York, and a daughter who is studying history at Cambridge University.’

‘Do you visit them?’ Maya wanted to extend the soft conversation.

‘No, they come home once a year. I cannot travel now. Old age is catching up.’

‘Sir, you also said Subbaiah stopped you. Who is he?’

‘My best friend. Actually, he was my boss in the department. We were neighbors and very close to each other.’

‘Was he against the civil war too?’

‘No, of course not. He was one of the main leaders of the movement. He worked hard to organize the students and rattled the government with the agitation.’

‘How? Was he also a democratic socialist like you?’

‘No. He believed in the free market system. He admired America. You know, although we had different ideologies, we respected each other a great deal. I miss him too,’ he said staring blankly ahead.

‘Sir, where is your friend now?’

Hearing this, Ganapathy glared at her, sprang up from the bench, picked up his walking stick and started walking away without a word.

‘Sir...I am sorry if I upset you. Can we meet again?’

Gananpathy suddenly turned around.

‘You know...you remind me of a young exchange student from Korea whom I met during the civil war. You have the same inquisitive nature, always asking too many questions. Actually, I think you also look a bit like him. Meet me here tomorrow, same time, and no questions about Subbaiah!’

Chapter 10: CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS

Moon opened his eyes to the strains of devotional music and tinkling of bells. His whole body was aching, left arm wrapped in plaster feeling sore. Drenched in sweat, he tried getting up, but had no strength.

‘What happened? Where am I? How did I get here?’

He noticed that the clothes he was wearing were not his, a half sleeve vest that was two times his size and a colorful striped lungi wound around his waist.

Moon heard some singing, and more tinkling of bells, as sweet incense smell wafted in. Desperate to find out, he painfully rose up and tried getting out of bed again, but his legs were asleep. The body was not willing to cooperate, and he stumbled, upsetting a stainless steel pail of water on a stool near the cot.

‘Are you OK?’ a concerned voice shouted from outside.

Professor Subbaiah's wife!

Malathi came rushing in, still holding the prayer bell in her hand, with her wet hair wrapped in a white towel.

‘I am fine,’ Moon said, as he painfully pulled himself up on the bed.

‘You shouldn't be getting up, the doctor has advised complete bedrest. Don't worry, I will clean it up, and make you a hot cup of filter coffee.’

Subbaiah rushed in a moment later, newspaper in hand.

‘Moon, how are you feeling now?’

‘Not very good, my body still pains. Sir, how did I get here?’

‘You almost died in the stampede. I am sorry for forcing you to attend the meeting, we should have anticipated this.’

‘Where did you find me?’

‘You were lying in the hospital. The police couldn't find any ID on you and guessed that you may be university student. Inspector Balasubramaniam who knows Ganapathy contacted us. At first they wouldn't allow us to bring you here, but after we convinced them you are a foreigner, they let us go.’

‘What happened yesterday? Did Anna and your leaders come?’

‘No, they were not allowed. The police have banned all public meetings. You can read about everything here,’ he said handing Moon the newspaper.

Nine people died, and thousands were injured when police firing sparked a stampede on Marina Beach, just minutes before Mr. C. N. Annadurai was expected to address his supporters. The meeting was organized to protest the Prime Minister's announcement that Hindi will be made the sole national language, starting August 1st, 1965.

The police blamed some 'unruly' elements in the crowd who attacked the police with stones and soda bottles, which provoked the firing. Eyewitnesses, including this reporter, did not see any evidence to these claims...

The 7000-strong crowd that started gathering at the venue from afternoon were given strict instructions not to indulge in violence, so there was a festive atmosphere, with singing, dancing and sloganeering...

Police Commissioner Thambidurai, took the stage at 6.20 pm and announced that the meeting had been banned because of possible law and order problems. It was at this time that the crowd got restive and protested...

‘Sir, what is going to happen now?’

‘It has already begun. People have started protesting, burning public buildings, trains and buses.’

‘What is your party planning to do?’

‘Anna believes in nonviolence. I don't know whether there is a change in plans now. I will call the party office after sometime. It is too early now and I do not want to disturb Ganapathy.’

‘I think we should go back to Hyderabad for a few days. It is not very safe here,’ Malathi said, as she came in, handed Moon a cup of coffee and started mopping the wet floor with a dry cloth.

‘Malathi, please don't overreact. Everything will be fine. In any case, the University campus is very safe, and there will be no violence here.’

‘What about our food? The rice is getting over and we do not have any fresh vegetables. If you don't hurry, the shops will all be closed, we have to get enough provisions.’

‘You are right. What time does Mohan open his shop?’

‘Mohan's shop is open at six everyday. He also sells milk. Why don't you hurry up and get us enough milk and rice?’

‘Anything else?’

‘If there are some fresh vegetables, get whatever you like...also some eggs. Do you have enough money?’

‘I don't think so. Let me check... I have to go to the bank today, only 20 rupees in my wallet.’

‘Don't worry, I have some money that I saved for emergencies,’ Malathi said going to the kitchen. She pulled out the rice container and dug in. Pulling out three ten-rupee notes, she said, ‘I think that should be more than enough.’

‘Where did you get the money?’

I have been saving from your salary. Don't complain now. If I hadn't, we would be starving.’

‘Oh, women...I will be back soon. I will also call up Senthil on the way back. Ganapathy should be awake by then.’

‘Maa'm, where is the bathroom?’ Moon asked, as Subbaiah left the room.

‘It is in the other room. Careful, let me help you get up, you look very weak.’

‘Thank you, I am really grateful to you and sir for taking care of me. I don't know what I would have done.’

‘Don't worry. You would do the same if we were in trouble. Wouldn't you?’

‘Of course,’ Moon said, as he limped towards the bathroom.

‘I will get you a fresh towel and soap, there is a new toothbrush in the bathroom.’

#

Thirty minuets later, Subbaiah came back panting, carrying a week's provisions from Mohan's store.

‘I just spoke to Senthil we have a meeting at ten’ he shouted out to Malathi, who was in the kitchen preparing dosas for breakfast.

‘What did he say?’

‘We are going to have another demonstration on Marina Beach in the evening?’

‘Are they crazy?’ Malathi responded, coming out.

‘No, Indira is. She does not know how strong we are.’

‘Public meetings have been banned. How will Anna and everyone come there? They were prevented last night, you think the police will allow people there today?’

‘In disguise. Public meetings have been banned, but people are still free to stroll on the beach. We will not have any stage.’

‘They will find out the plan.’

‘So what? We will still have a meeting. We live in a democracy, not a dictatorship like Soviet Union.’

‘Sir, is it safe?’ Moon asked, emerging from his room limping.

‘There is a lot of risk, but if we do not protest, they will force Hindi down our throats. We have to show at least some resistance.’

‘The police might shoot again.’

‘A few sacrifices are inevitable in revolutions. Nine innocent people died yesterday, and thousands were injured, including you,’ Subbaiah retorted.

‘What else did Senthil say?’ Malathi asked.

‘There were violent protests in Bangalore, Hyderabad and Cochin this morning. A few protests were also reported from Bombay and Calcutta. This time, we are not alone.’

‘Nothing was announced in the 8 o’Clock news. I just switched off the radio.’

‘Not surprising, as Indira controls All India Radio, I will try BBC Overseas Service, they are the most reliable for domestic news,’ he said fiddling with the knobs until the reception was loud and clear.

‘Damn it, the BBC news just got over, we have to wait another hour.’

‘Sir all my luggage is in the hostel, I would like to go back since it is an unnecessary burden for you,’ Moon said.

‘Don't be silly. Give me your room key I will pick up your luggage after my meeting. You are not going anywhere until you recover.’

‘I lost my wallet and keys last night...’

‘Don't worry, I will ask the hostel warden and get your luggage. Feel at home here, I also bought some packets of Chinese noodles from Mohan's store, you can tell Malathi how to prepare your soup.’

‘Sir, if you don't mind, please don't forget the toilet paper rolls in my room.’

‘Of course, how thoughtless of me. Malathi is breakfast ready? What are we having today, dosas?’

‘Yes, I just have to make four more.’

‘What is dosa?’ Moon asked.

‘It is a kind of pancake from rice and dal. South Indians normally eat dosa or idli for breakfast. We can have it with sambar and chutney. What do Koreans eat for breakfast?’

‘We do not have separate breakfast food. A normal breakfast consists of rice, a small bowl of soup or stew, and side dishes like kimchi.’

‘Rice? Then you can have it here too, though we may not get your side dishes here.’

‘That is fine sir. I would like to eat the same food you eat.’

‘That is the spirit. What is the use of living in a different country if you cannot experience their culture and food?’

‘When I was studying in Cambridge, my Indian friends used to visit the same Bangladeshi restaurant for all their meals. They never tried out British food.’

‘I heard British food is fish and chips, roast beef, porridge and potatoes.’

‘You are right, they have no imagination. They should adopt Indian curry as their national dish. There were a lot of European restaurants that provided variety. None of the Indians even ventured there, as they did not understand the concept of being exchange students. Never be like them.’

‘No sir, I am trying to understand the local culture. One day, I might even send my children to come here to study.’

‘That is thoughtful, but one does not know what is going to happen. Will India remain the same now?’

‘What do you mean, sir?’

‘Everything depends on tonight’s meeting. Other states have started protesting, and if we all join together, then Indira may change her mind. If she does not, there may be a lot of violence and the country can never recover from the shock.’

‘You mean all the states might secede, like the attempt by Southern states in American Civil War.’

‘I don't rule out that possibility.’

‘Will there be civil war here? Do you think the Prime Minister will allow that?’

‘She won't, but if she uses force more will die and the international community may have to intervene.’ Seeing the shocked look on Moons face he continued,

‘Don't worry, I will keep you safe and send you back to your country before the situation gets out of control.’

‘Breakfast is ready,’ Malathi shouted from the kitchen.

#

‘Hello young man,’ Ganapathy said from across yard, seeing Moon on the patio chair staring at the clouds with a blank expression on his face.

‘Hello sir,’ Moon replied startled.

How are you feeling now? Where is Subbaiah?’

‘I'm better. Professor Subbaiah has gone for a party meeting.’

‘That same nonsense again. What are they doing to our nation?’

‘Is the University closed today sir?’

‘Of course it is. There is so much violence no one will send their children to study. I will just put on my shirt and come there. I too am feeling a bit bored.’

A few minutes later, Ganapathy was by his side.’

‘Anni,’ he called out to Malathi who was listening to her favorite radio program inside.

‘Thammudu,’ she replied coming out.

‘Can I have a nice cup of filter coffee?’ he requested, dragging a chair from inside.

‘Sure, I will be right back.’

‘Sir, you just called Maam Anni. What does it mean?’

It means elder sister-in-law in Tamil. I consider Subbaiah as my elder brother, she called me younger brother in Telugu.’

‘It is so strange. In Corean, Eonni means elder sister.’

‘That is a coincidence.’

‘I don't think so. I came across other words like amma and appa. We also have the similar words. How can we have the same words, is Tamil related to Corean?’

‘Not that I know of. Tamil is one of the longest surviving classical languages in the world and is the only Indian language other than Sanskrit to be considered as ancient and authentically original in its form.’

‘Is it possible that some Tamilians settled down in East Asia and influenced our language?’

‘That is possible, the Chola Dynasty which ruled from 9th to 13th century also expanded to Southeast Asia. They may have had a cultural influence on Corean.’

‘Chola dynasty?’

‘In ancient times there were three kingdoms in Southern Indian; Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas who were very powerful.’

‘Just like in Corean again. We too had three kingdoms -Goguryeo, Baekje and Silla, which dominated the peninsula.’

‘This is so strange. It appears that there are many similarities. I better alert Professor Dhandapani, I am sure he will find more. This needs more careful historical research.’

‘Yes sir, I am sure they will find a lot of similarities, except of course the looks.’

‘You are right,’ he smiled, as Malathi placed two cups of coffee on the small stool near them and went inside again. It somehow broke their conversation.

‘Sir, will everything be alright here?’ Moon asked trying to pick up a new thread.

‘I am afraid not. This time it is getting to be very serious, I only hope there is a peaceful solution.’

‘You mean if the Prime Minister takes back her announcement?’

‘No, I mean if the Tamil politicians accept Hindi, then we can carry on with our lives.’

‘The other day you explained to me that it is unfair to impose Hindi, just as it is unfair to impose German in Europe.’

‘Yes, I did, but India is not Europe. We became independent 18 years ago, and have already broken up our country once. This is a silly issue to fight for when we have so much poverty. We need to first grow to the European levels of development and then think about all these mundane issues.’

‘Isn't it a question of identity? The Japanese tried to wipe out our identity when they ruled us, Professor Subbaiah's party is afraid that the Dravidian identity may be wiped out.’

‘That is stretching things a bit too far, many Congress leaders are from the South. If they have no problems, then why should we fear? These small parties only want to come to power, and they will do anything to achieve their goals.’

‘Sir, do you support the Congress party?’

‘Yes I do, they fought for our independence and they are the only secular party which cares for our country's development.’

‘That is not what Professor Subbaiah told me.’

‘The main goal of his party is to humiliate Brahmins.’

‘I heard that Tamil Brahmins are dominating the society and practicing casteism.’

‘That is their old argument. They are reluctant to accept us as Tamilians because they say that our ancestors migrated from North India.’

‘You mean to say that your community was actually Aryan?’

‘There are no Aryans and no Dravidians. We all belong to the same race, this division was created by the British and other European scholars.’

‘Sir, you look different from the other Tamilians, you are fairer and could be easily mistaken for a North Indian.’

‘Color and facial appearance has nothing to do with race.’

‘So then Koreans could also be the same race as Tamilians, since we have many common words in the language?’

‘That is a bit far-fetched. You are clearly the Mongolian race. A little inter-mixing may have taken place years ago, but that is for the anthropologists to find out, I am an economics professor.’

‘You were saying that Tamil Brahmins are not accepted by other castes in South India? ‘

‘Yes, to get back to the point, Subbaiah's party is trying to push us away by saying that we are proficient in Sanskrit, and are Aryans. Actually the older generations of Brahmins were more interested in Tamil than Sanskrit. Many of them were scholars in Tamil and Sanskrit. Now they want to associate Tamil with the anti-Brahmin movement. This is a very clever strategy to isolate us.’

‘Is it true that most of the important positions in government are held by Brahmins?’

‘That is because many Brahmins gave importance to education. With good education, anyone can get important positions. The other castes did not give

importance to education, and concentrated on their traditional skills, but once they saw that the Brahmins have occupied important positions, they are upset.’

‘Didn't they have important positions in ancient India too?’

‘We do not have factual information about the status of Tamil Brahmins before the British came to India. There were many Brahmin Ministers and officials under the Kings, but a vast majority of them were middle class or poor and dependent on the temples for their livelihood.’

‘They did not always have power?’

‘Even now they do not have as much power as they make you believe. I will tell you one thing for certain; when East India Company first came to India it was the trading community and not the Brahmins who prospered. The caste-based hierarchy has never represented the balance of power. Everyone accepts that Brahmins are the final authority in respect of religion, that’s all.’

‘They occupy the highest position in your caste system.’

‘That is right, but we were never considered as a ruling class. The lower caste Kshatriyas, were the rulers and the trading was left to people from Subbaiah's community, Vysyas. Only in respect of religion, Brahmins were supreme. So it is wrong to say that we always had power. We are a deeply misunderstood community.’

‘Then why are they against you?’

‘It is all politics, as I told you before. Look I am a Brahmin by birth, but I eat non-vegetarian and am an atheist, completely against the caste system. Many Tamil Brahmins were in the forefront for social reforms like women's education, rights and abolition of child marriage. But Subbaiah's party wants to ignore everything, and that is why I am against them.’

‘You seem to be very close to each other despite the differences.’

‘We have our ideological differences, but still respect each other. We are like brothers.’

‘Good to know, sir.’

‘So, you will be staying here for sometime?’

‘Maa’m insists that I stay till I recover.’

‘What about your clothes and luggage?’

‘Professor Subbaiah said he will bring them after his meeting.’

‘Nice, since there will be no classes now, I can come and chat with you regularly.’

‘Although you are against the imposition of Hindi, won’t you participate in the protests?’

‘Of course not, the last thing I want is for DMK to come to power.’

#

Subbaiah came back home for lunch with more news and Moon's bags.

‘Malathi,’ he shouted from the verandah.

‘You are back?’ she asked emerging from the kitchen. ‘Moon is taking a nap, you better lower your voice.’

‘How is he now?’

‘He looks better. Thammudu was here giving him company for sometime.’

‘I have important news for you.’

‘What?’

‘I think you should go to Hyderabad for some days and stay with your mother.’

‘Why?’

‘The situation is getting worse.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘We have decided to launch a violent agitation if our meeting is blocked today.’

‘That is OK. I was here in January. No one will come to the campus.’

‘Malathi, this is different. We are going to fight for a separate country, all the other States have agreed to our plan.’

‘What separate country? Like Pakistan?’

‘Yes. Indira has left us with no option. Anna is going to make the announcement tonight.’

‘That is crazy.’

‘I know, and we may not succeed, but if we do not threaten them, they will continue to be stubborn.’

‘Then it is just a bargaining tactic?’

‘For now yes, but if they use violence to crush our movement, we will seriously fight for it. Andhra, Mysore and Kerala are behind us. They will launch similar agitations.’

‘Why don't you come with me? We can stay away from all this. I am really worried.’

‘It is not right. I am in charge of the student's demonstrations. Also if we succeed, I have been promised an important position in the party and new government.’

‘You are a professor. We don't need any government position. What if something happens to you? There will be a lot of violence. Please listen to me.’

‘Malathi, don't get unreasonable like your mother. I have to do this. I will anyway come to Hyderabad next week. I also have to coordinate with the other parties in Andhra.’

‘When do I have to leave?’

‘I have booked your ticket. The Howrah Mail departs at five I could not get a direct train. At Vijaywada, your coach will be attached to another train, so you do not have to worry. I am not sure that there will be any trains or buses running tomorrow.’

‘I don't have time to cook more food for you. What will you eat?’

‘That is alright, we will manage. Maybe Moon can teach me how to cook noodle soup. Don't worry about me.’

‘What about Moon? Shouldn't he also go back to his country?’

I thought of that. He has still not recovered. If the situation gets worse after one week, I will buy him a flight ticket and send him back. He can also take a ship.’

‘Why don't you talk to thammudu and ask him to call his brother-in-law in Delhi. Maybe he will have more information, Indira may relent.’

‘Yes, that is a good idea. I will do that. Keep Moon's bags in our room. No use disturbing him now. I will be back soon, meanwhile you finish cooking and start packing.’

#

It was midnight by the time Subbaiah returned from Marina Beach. Moon was anxiously waiting for him, seated on the porch, listening to what sounded like firecrackers. Ganapathy had briefly chatted with him before retiring home. His

brother-in-law had warned that Indira was serious about making Hindi the national language as her political survival depended on it. Stay indoors, he had advised.

Malathi had left for Hyderabad, and the silence in the house was driving Moon crazy.

‘Still awake?’ Subbaiah asked as he spotted Moon sitting on the cane chair, in the dim moonlight.

‘What happened sir? Is everything OK?’

‘No, of course not, they are forcing our hand.’

‘Sir?’

‘They called in the army. The army against its own citizens! They prevented us from having any meeting. Anna and Karunanidhi managed to escape, but many people have been arrested.’

‘Was there violence like yesterday?’

‘Much more. Unbelievable. How can Indira use the army against us?’

‘What will happen now?’

‘A fight to the death. We need a separate country. Why don't you go to sleep? I have to leave again, as we have a meeting to decide our future course of action.’

‘Sir, can you help me switch on the radio? I tried, but could not connect to BBC News.’

‘Oh sure,’ Subbaiah said, turning a few knobs. ‘It takes time for the frequency to be caught. I will take a bath and then leave. Did you eat anything?’

‘Yes, Maa'm put some food in my room.’

As Subbaiah walked towards his bedroom, the radio in the living room sputtered to life. Just in time for the news.

Heavy gunfire is being heard on Marina Beach as anti-Hindi demonstrators continue to defy curfew in Madras. Ambulances were seen heading to the area and at least thirty fatalities have been reported so far, with more than 1,500 others injured, according to officials and doctors quoted by the news agencies.

Gunshots were also regularly ringing out of the area. Witnesses said the military allowed thousands of Congress party supporters, armed with hockey sticks and knives, to enter the area. Opposition groups said the government had sent in thugs to suppress anti-Hindi protests.

Our correspondent said the army seemed to be standing by and facilitating the clashes. Though initially put on the backfoot by the sudden attack, determined anti-government protesters look to be winning the battle. Witnesses also said that pro-Congress supporters were dragging away protesters they had managed to grab and handing them over to security forces.

Fighting is taking place around army tanks deployed around the beach, with stones bouncing off the armored vehicles. Several groups were involved in fistfights. The opposition also said many among the pro-Congress crowd were policemen in plain clothes. They have reportedly also seized police identification cards amongst the pro-Congress demonstrators...

Moon started sweating, and it was not because of his fever. As the news report continued rambling off shocking details of assault, he wondered what options he had. He was still very weak, and would not be able to catch a flight home in this condition. He had to bear it out for one more week, cooped up in Subbaiah's home.

Chapter 11: PAR FOR THE COURSE

‘So, how did your meeting with the crazy old man go?’ Naga asked Maya as she got into his car. He had been waiting for her to emerge from the university gates for close to 20 minutes now, and was even tempted to interrupt their meeting, when he suddenly saw Ganapathy walking away at a brisk pace. Maya was not far behind.

‘He talked a little about your father, but shut down as soon as he realized it,’ she said approaching the car.

‘That’s great, what did he say?’

‘They were close friends, almost like brothers.’

‘I was right all along. But something is fishy, why is he hiding that fact?’

‘He still speaks affectionately, and it is apparent he misses him.’

‘Then why can't he talk to me?’

‘There is something he is holding back, maybe some dark secret. We have to find out.’

‘It is possible that he helped the Hindustan agents kidnap my father. After all, he was the one who reported nanagaru’s kidnapping.’

‘Naga, I don't think that is possible. The police investigations did not throw up anything.’

‘We are talking about police investigations 30 years ago. They did not have modern facilities then. I would be the least surprised if it were true. From what you told me he was against the civil war and continues to praise Hindustan.’

‘That doesn't mean a thing. I am sure many people were against the civil war. Anyway, I have to meet him again tomorrow, maybe I can get out some more information.’

‘I have an idea, why don't you record the conversation? I can give you the digital pen-recorder that I use for my interviews.’

‘Are you sure? Wouldn't it be cheating?’

‘He is lying and I see no other way out,’ he said, slowing down the car. ‘There appears to be a massive traffic jam ahead. I hate this peak hour traffic. Why does everyone have to drive? We have an excellent subway and public transport.’

‘You could ask the question to yourself,’ Maya said, looking ahead.

‘You are right,’ Naga replied sheepishly, switching on the traffic channel on his car radio.

Traffic alert for travelers on Beach Road. There has been a bomb blast near Parliament and traffic has come to a standstill. All the approach roads have been blocked. You are advised to avoid this route.

According to Eenadu News Agency, four people have died and seven injured in what appears to be another terrorist attack. Although no group has claimed responsibility, police sources say it appears to be the handiwork of Telengana Freedom Army...

‘We will have to turn back and take the Flag Staff road,’ her said shifting to the first lane for a U-turn

‘Is this the group that wants to join Hindustan?’

‘Yeah, they are funded and trained by those bastards in Delhi.’

‘You said earlier that they are a small minority.’

‘Very small, but quite organized, we will track them down and wipe them clean.’

‘So where are we going now?’

‘It will take sometime for the road to clear. Do you want to see a Tamil movie?’

‘You have to translate all the dialogs for me.’

‘That won’t be necessary. There are a couple of theaters that show regional movies with English subtitles. Our government is trying to make Madras more foreigner-friendly, since we have a big expatriate crowd. There is even a blueprint to make it the business and tourist hub of Asia.’

‘You mean like Singapore?’

‘Yes, the plan is to give Singapore tough competition by making Madras more attractive for businesses.’

‘Don't you think companies may be afraid to invest because of your problems with Hindustan? What if there is another war?’

‘There won't be another war. Hindustan does not have the economic strength to survive if there is one. All their threats are just for keeping their citizens under control. You saw what happened after the previous war in 1993, their economy was shattered and they are yet to recover. Half their population starves.’

‘Foreigners don't necessarily think so.’

‘You know, it is all media hype. The foreign reporters here have to justify their salaries, so they constantly blow up the situation. The only thing they report on is our tension, which is exploited by Hindustan. Every time there is a report, the global markets go for a spin. I won’t be surprised if the reporters make profits on the stock market. No one here believes there will be war,’

‘Fine, I understand. Which movie do you want to see?’

‘Let us see the latest Rajanikanth movie Chandramukhi. I told you he is planning to run for President this year, you will see why he is so popular.’

‘Is he your favorite actor?’

‘No, my favorite is Kamalhaasan who is more talented, Rajanikanth is more popular among the masses.’

‘You are not part of the masses?’

‘I didn't say that. Kamalhaasan does thinking movies, while Rajankanth does action-musicals that the people find more entertaining, no thinking necessary.’

‘How old is Rajanikanth?’

‘He is 55.’

‘What? And he does action musicals?’

‘Yeah, he wears a wig to look much younger.’

‘And Kamalhaasan?’

‘He is 51 years old.’

‘Why are all your popular actors so old?’

‘We have younger actors, but they do not have the same charisma as these two.’

‘Is Kamalhaasan interested in politics?’

‘He won't succeed.’

‘How can you be so sure?’

‘He is a Brahmin.’

‘What has that got to do with politics?’

‘He is considered Aryan, and it will be very difficult for him to win elections in Dravida.’

‘You mean a Brahmin can never win elections in Dravida?’

‘No, they can, and we have many Brahmin politicians, but it is definitely a disadvantage.’

‘You mean to say that since Rajanikanth is not a Brahmin, he may win the elections?’

‘That is not the only reason. He is extremely popular in all the provinces.’

‘What is his caste?’

‘Actually, his family is from Maharashtra province, which is in Hindustan. He was born and brought up in Bangalore. His caste, Maratha, is also considered Dravidian, but Hindustan has control over the province.’

‘It is all very confusing. Are you sure that Aryans and Dravidians are not the same race?’

‘I don't believe they are, although many Brahmins consider so.’

‘Isn't it strange that a democratic free market country discriminates against people because of their caste?’

‘Hey, we don't discriminate against Brahmins. They are free to contest elections, and if they have done good social work, they will win.’

‘Naga, I have never asked you before. What is your caste?’

‘I don't believe in the caste system. My family comes from the kapu caste in Andhra. They are mostly farmers turned traders.’

‘That explains your opposition to Brahmins.’

‘Hey, I have nothing against them. In any case they were powerful for thousands of years and discriminated against the other castes. So if there is reverse discrimination now, they deserve it.’

‘That is not what Professor Ganapathy told me.’

‘He will say that because he is a Brahmin.’

‘I can see that your country is deeply divided along caste lines.’

Naga kept quiet, it was true, unlike Hindustan where religion played an important role in driving local politics, Dravida’s issues were mainly caste and ethnicity.

Maya noticed a heavily barricaded road to her right. A couple of US Army trucks were stationed on one side, with around a dozen armed soldiers milling around.

‘What is that road, why is it blocked with soldiers?’

‘That is the entrance to Rajan Garrison, headquarters of the American military in Dravida.’

‘In the center of the city?’

‘Yes, that is right. It is a legacy of our civil war. President Narsimhan wants to shift them away from the city center, and negotiations are still ongoing, it will free up a lot of prime space in Madras.’

Dravida and the United States reached an agreement to complete the relocation of the Rajan Garrison to an expanded military base in Tambaram. The two sides, however, remain split over the timeline. Dravida agreed to bear the cost of relocating, and was pushing for end-2008.

‘How big is this facility?’ she asked, noticing high walls with electrified fences and security cameras on one side of the road in a never-ending stream.

‘The garrison is around 620 acres, just like a small US township. It has housing areas, a large commissary, post exchange, recreation facilities, restaurants, sports complexes, library, hospital, schools and a gas station. There is also a hotel inside the compound.’

‘Wow. How many people stay inside this town?’

‘Around 40,000 do so now. There are four other U.S. Army bases in Dravida; Mangalore, Hyderabad, Vishakhapatnam and Cochin. The total US army presence will be around 300,000.’

‘That is quite a lot.’

‘Yes it is, but it ensures our safety and is a kind of insurance against any attack by Hindustan. The US military has been granted operational control if there is war,’ he said, his foot pressing on the brakes as the traffic light turned orange.

‘Isn’t it degrading for Dravidians?’

‘Of course, there is a lot of opposition, especially from the liberal political parties. The anti-American sentiment spiked three years ago after two U.S. soldiers in a tank hit and killed two teenage girls in Mangalore. But we have no option, we cannot fight the Hindustan army alone.’

‘Another form of imperialism practiced by America.’

‘I told you before, Soviet Union has more soldiers based in Hindustan. It is just cold war politics where the smaller countries become pawns,’ Naga replied. ‘On the left ahead, is the commercial district of Sepoy Town. There is a lot of westernized shopping and nightclubs, but the locals avoid it. It can get quite dangerous at night, as it is also the red light district frequented by soldiers. That's why I never took you there. We will go to the right, where there is another commercial area,’ he added, as the light turned green.

Before long they had arrived at their destination.

‘Don't be too late,’ Maya said, getting off, as Naga promised to park the car and meet her at the entrance of Safire Multiplex.

She noticed a huge crowd milling around the booking counters. She was surprised as it was a weekday. In Corea, only the weekend shows saw this kind of crowd.

These guys are really crazy for their movies.

She looked up and saw huge cutouts of movie posters that were on show at the Shanthi Multiplex. All of them seemed to be in the local languages, and she could identify three different language scripts, having no idea what they represented. Five of the posters prominently featured men with darker skin, only one had the face of a stocky man with fairer skin.

That guy must be Kamalhaasan. He doesn't look like the others.

She did not notice a single Hollywood movie on show, although English was a national language.

‘Is that Kamalhaasan?’ she asked Naga, pointing towards the poster as he approached her.

‘You got it right. Doesn't he look much better than the other guys?’

‘He does. Tell me, why are all the women so fat?’

‘Dravidians like them plump, as they consider it healthy. Anyway, I like women who are slim like you.’

‘Why is there no Hollywood movie on show here?’ she asked, ignoring his remark.

‘We have a screen quota system.’

‘What does it mean?’

‘To protect the domestic film industry, the government has made it a law that theaters should show Dravidian language movies for 200 days in a year, so very few Hollywood movies are released here.’

‘How has it helped?’

‘Dollywood has thrived and improved. Had it not been for the quota, we would not have been able to make quality movies, and capture the imagination of the world. Look at the fate of Hindi movies, there is hardly any originality, and every film is made to develop a personality cult of the Nehru dynasty.’

‘What if you want to watch the latest Hollywood movies?’

‘That is no problem, we have many video-on-demand services, and can watch it at home a week after they are released abroad.’

‘Which of these movie are we going to watch?’ she asked pointing towards the posters.

‘The second one up there.’

‘Do you think I will enjoy it?’

‘Many foreigners have liked the movie. Although, the real purpose of bringing you here is to see for yourself the hysteria that Rajanikanth generates.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Look over there,’ he said gazing towards a crowded area at the entrance gates.’

Maya looked stunned as she saw people praying before a poster of Rajanikanth. A few were pouring milk on the lifelike cutout; others split coconuts on the ground, offering garlands and money, while even more people danced in a trance.

Is it for real? They are treating him like God.

‘This is nothing. Just wait till the movie starts,’ Naga said.

Chandramukhi was unlike any movie Maya had seen before. While the story of the plot was wafer thin, about the ghost of a hundred year old court dancer and her revenge on the people who killed her, there was a lot of action, drama and music which seemed irrelevant to the main plot. The movie was confusing, more so because many of the actors looked alike to her. The English subtitles did help, but only to a limited extent, the whole cultural mismatch left Maya more confused, but the crowd seemed to love it. Every time Rajanikanth appeared on the screen in multicolored clothes, the people went hysterical, screaming in joy, whistling and throwing money on the screen.

‘How did you like the movie?’ Naga asked as they drove away from Shanthi multiplex. He had noticed her dozing off many times through the movie, only to wake up with a start to the loud screaming and howling by the audience.

‘Not bad, actually very confusing.’

‘I understand, we have too much drama and irrelevant subplots in our movies and the length is another problem. I prefer the Hollywood movies which have tighter stories.’

‘Do people actually wear such atrocious clothes in real life? He looked like a Pyongyang Circus clown.’

‘You mean the bright colors? You won't believe it, but Rajanikanth is considered a style icon here. He can pull off any dress, and his style immediately becomes a national sensation.’

‘He reminds me of Yeong-gu,’ she chuckled.

Yeong-gu was a hugely popular slapstick comedy character in Korean cinema, modeled on the lines of Charlie Chaplin.

‘Is he a popular actor?’

‘Yes, the best comedian we have.’

‘Rajanikanth is not a comedian. Remember that dark fellow in the movie who was afraid of ghosts? He is the comedian.’

‘Most people in the movie were dark. Anyway, I found Rajanikanth more funny.’

‘What do you know? I saw you dozing many times,’ he replied slightly annoyed.

‘Anyone will fall asleep with so many songs.’

‘That is the last Tamil movie I am taking you to. I thought it would help you understand the importance of movies, the hysteria they generate and the reason why so many actors become politicians.’

‘What do you mean? Hysteria, I saw. The reason they become politicians, I did not.’

‘Many of the actors have used movies to build up a reputation and then dived into politics on the strength of the goodwill. This hysteria is linked to their success as politicians. As I told you before, our four Presidents were extremely popular in South India; MGR in Tamil Nadu, NTR in Andhra Pradesh, Raajkumar in Karnataka and now Jayalalitha again from Tamil Nadu. They all acted in roles that helped them in their political careers later. They convinced people that their political values mirrored their film roles.’

‘What about Kerala?’

‘There was one popular actor from Kerala, Prem Nazir, who tried to join politics, but failed. Malayalam movies are not as popular as Tamil, Telugu or Kannada, so he did not have a nation-wide appeal.’

‘Rajanikanth has a nationwide appeal with that silly style?’

‘Sure, he will be our next President.’

‘From today’s movie, I gather that he is just an action hero who fights, sings and dances in clown clothes. How will that help his political career? Don’t tell me he will wear those clothes while in office.’

‘Unlike the other actors before him, he does not try to portray the image of a sinless God fearing man. So there are no ideological hang-ups, but he gives inspiration to the people. There are more than 200,000 fan clubs that engage in numerous social activities. The people love him for his humility.’

‘This would never happen anywhere else in the world,’ she retorted still confused.

‘I am feeling hungry. Where do we go now?’

‘I am sorry, I forgot about your early dinnertime. Why don’t we order in? Chinese?’

‘Sure, I am in no mood to go to a restaurant now, the movie just killed my patience, just hope this traffic gets better.’

#

‘Do you want a drink? It will take time for the food to be delivered,’ Naga asked Maya as she emerged from her room wearing a tight blue top and short skirt. He had changed into an old T-shirt and shorts.

‘Yes, I could do with a scotch.’

She looks lovely in that skirt.

‘Exactly what I want,’ he said unscrewing a fresh bottle of Glenmorangie, his favorite single malt, while stealing a glance at her soft shapely legs. She had folded her left right under the right and he caught a glimpse of her red panty.

‘By the way, what happened to your roommate? I always meant to ask you but forgot. You said he would be back soon.’

‘Sunder? He will back on Thursday. You can meet him before we leave for Hyderabad,’ he replied trying his best to avoid staring at her legs.

‘What does he do?’

‘He teaches International Relations at Madras University.’

‘University? If he was here, he could have dug out more dirt on Professor Ganapathy.’

‘I know. I called him on his mobile, but he was not of much help. He said he needs to be on campus to fish out the details.’

‘Where is he now?’

‘He is in Colombo, attending a close friends’ wedding. Let me show you his photograph, it should be in my album,’ he said, walking towards the bookshelf.

‘Here he is.’

‘He looks quite old and different from the other Dravidians,’ she said looking at a fair man with a balding face sprinkled with a smattering of grey hair, sharp nose and steady jawline.

‘Yes, he is five years older than me, his family defected from Hindustan.’

‘From Hindustan?’

‘His grandfather sheltered a few Muslims during the communal riots, was prosecuted and must be languishing in one of the prison camps. His father defected fearing harassment.’

‘When was that?’

‘In 1975, the same year that my father disappeared.’

‘What do his parents do here?’

‘They are well off. At first they struggled to adapt, and there was a lot of discrimination, but now everyone accepts them; they own a restaurant serving Hindustani food in the city,’ he said, ‘Do you want ice or soda?’

‘Two cubes please. Can I meet them?’

‘I thought of that. We will wait for Sunder to return, as it will be more appropriate. Let me mark it on the calendar, July 23rd should be good for me, it is a Friday and I can get off early.’

‘What is the date today?’

‘Today is the 20th, it is nine days since you arrived here.’

‘Is it the 20th already? How could I forget?’

‘Forget what?’

‘Nothing...’ Maya said, as tears welled up in her eyes and she gulped down her scotch in one go. ‘Can I have more please? I prefer it neat.’

‘Maya, something wrong?’ he asked, refilling her glass.

She remained silent, and drank it in one go again. This time, tears rolled down her cheeks.

‘Is it something I said?’ he muttered, handing her a tissue.

‘I am such a horrible mother!’ she said sobbing uncontrollably, extending her glass for more scotch.

Puzzled, Naga topped her glass and emptied his own.

Did she just say mother?

The doorbell buzzed, and he got up.

‘Must be our food. I will be right back.’

He glanced back while walking towards the front door. She was sobbing uncontrollably now, and sniffing into the tissue. A part of him felt angry that she had hidden her marriage and child from him.

I am being used, just as I feared.

He returned with the food packets in hand, and noticed her holding her head down in her palms. He placed the food on the kitchen counter and hurried to her side. He couldn't control himself despite the negative currents in his mind.

‘Maya, is everything alright?’ he asked softly, yet shaking slightly at her betrayal.

‘No it is not,’ she replied sniffing back her tears, ‘How could I forget my son's birthday?’

‘How old is he?’ he asked hesitatingly.

‘Three years today.’

‘Do you want to speak to him now?’

‘It is too late. I promised to call in the morning. He would have been waiting at our neighbors house, my parents do not have a telephone at home.’

‘What about his father?’

‘I don't know.’

What do you mean you don't know?

‘We can call your neighbors, it is only ten.’

‘No, it will be late, I will try tomorrow morning.’

‘You never told me you were married,’ he muttered, sipping on his scotch, anxious to find out more about her marital status.

‘That's because I am not married, we separated two years ago, right after Dong-min was born. He was a jerk, even refusing to provide child support, I am glad he disappeared from my life.’

‘Do you have a photograph of your son?’

‘Yes, it is lying on my dressing table. Can you please get it for me?’ she requested, pouring another stiff drink. Her face was now flushed red.

Naga got up and walked towards her room. He still had a lot of questions to ask, and his mind was spinning. It was certainly not the scotch.

He gently opened the door to her room, and switched on the lights. It had been nine days, and he never attempted to peek in, respecting her privacy.

The room still retained her peach aroma, the smell that he longed for. It was a bit disorganized, the bed was unmade and the covers were bunched together, with a few books and articles scattered on top. Her used clothes lay in a pile on the floor near the bathroom door.

He eyed her folded undergarments on the clothes rack, and something stirred inside him. He had half a mind to pick up her bra, but resisted.

Spotting the framed photograph on her dressing table, he picked it up and hurried out, covering his guilt with a shy smile.

‘He looks cute. So his name is Dong-min Choi?’

‘No. Park Dong-min. In Corea, the child takes the father's family name, while the wife retains her maiden name,’ she said caressing the photo and staring at her son lovingly. Tears once again began to force their way out.

Naga put his arm around her, 'I know how you feel. You must really miss him.'

'Poor boy must be so lonely. I hated to leave him back. I am so selfish for leaving my baby alone...' she said, crying loudly and hugging him tightly. 'Thank you Naga...thank you for your support.'

He felt her breath on his neck the sweet peach smell now grew stronger as her smooth hair caressed his cheeks. His shoulder felt damp as she continued sobbing and trembling, holding him tightly.

'He must be all right. Don't worry, you can speak to him tomorrow' he said, unable to control his feelings, as a tear dropped out of his left eye. As it splattered on her forehead, she looked up, and in one swift move pushed her mouth to his. Although taken aback, he couldn't let go of this opportunity and gently sucked on her rosy lips. Their tongues interlocked, his right hand caressed her back, while the left supported her face.

Feeling salty tears on his mouth, he gently licked it clean with his tongue, all the way to her eyelids, before kissing them. Her mouth now moved towards his right earlobe, which she felt with her wet tongue, before giving it a sharp bite. He hardly felt the pain, as his left hand pushed its ways into her skirt and she moaned. It only made him more excited.

With passions on both sides running high, he shifted his position gently, making her lie on her back as he straddled her.

Her mouth still slurping at his, her hands furiously ripped off the buttons on his shirt. With his left hand, he managed to unhook her bra and pulled the top over her shoulder. It was too tight to proceed further. He tried pulling it harder, but her soft wonderful mounds with pink stiff nipples standing erect, mischievously winked. She pushed his head down while her right hand wiggled inside his shorts.

His was still inside her, having managed to slip through the stubborn panty elastic. It kept advancing, like a snake in the grass hunting for its prey, until it touched the soft flesh, dripping with anticipation. However, his clumsy maneuver upset their balance and they rolled down from the sofa onto the floor, with a small thud, hearts thumping wildly.

Luckily for her, she fell on top. They froze for a millisecond, and then continued their game, tugging wildly at what was remaining of their clothes. She aided him, by pulling down her skirt, with her toe. Their naked bodies burned in lust, as they smothered each with more kisses and soft bites. This was the moment. Their juices were now ready to splurge and mix in harmony. Protection was the last thing on their minds.

Chapter 12: THE PLOT THICKENS

Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!

Moon woke up with a start. Someone was banging on the front door, shouting something in Tamil. He looked at his watch, it was seven already and the sunlight was streaming through the window bars forming the pattern of a prison grill on the floor.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!

Why is Professor Subbaiah not answering the door?

He painfully got up and tightened the knot of his lungi.

Although Subbaiah had brought his luggage from the hostel, Moon felt comfortable wearing the lungi. It provided for great ventilation in the hot and humid weather. The only irritant was the constant need to tighten the knot so that it did not slip away.

He limped to the living room, and realized that Subbaiah was not home.

More knocking and shouting; the voice was certainly not friendly. In fact, it seemed overtly aggressive.

He peeked through a window in the living room, managing to hide himself behind the curtain. There were a few armed policemen standing a little distance away, while one of them was menacingly banging on the door, pistol in hand.

Moon was frightened and confused.

What is happening? Where is Professor Subbaiah?

‘Who is it? Professor is not at home,’ he shouted out.

More banging. He peeked out again and noticed Professor Ganapathy standing on the side with his wife and a couple of other neighbors. He was talking to a few policemen.

Relieved, he drew the curtain to a side, coming in plain view. He tried to draw Ganapathy's attention, but when that failed, he shouted out in Corean, 'Shikoro.'

The policeman at the door came to the window and seemed surprised to see him. He said something in Tamil again.

Using body language, Moon told him to wait a moment, while he opened the door.

As soon as he unlatched the door, the policeman pushed him aside and rushed in. He searched all the rooms, before coming out again. By this time Ganapathy had come forward to console Moon.

'Sir, what is happening? Why are the policemen here? I have a student visa,' he quivered.

'Don't worry young man they are not after you. They are searching for Subbaiah. Any idea where he is?'

'No sir, he went out at night saying he had a meeting. I don't think he has come back.'

Ganapathy said something to the policeman, who glared at Moon, got into the rusty jeep and retreated.

'Why are they looking for Professor Subbaiah?'

'They have an arrest warrant for him. The police are taking many people under preventive custody to stop the riots. He has been identified as a troublemaker.'

'Sir, is there a lot of violence?'

‘Unimaginable. We didn't get the newspaper today, but I heard on the radio that the whole city is burning. Last night they brought in the army, which only made matters worse. The situation is equally bad in Andhra, Mysore and Kerala.’

‘What about the other states? I heard there are more non-Hindi speaking areas.’

‘No. They have not joined the protests. I am glad they understand the need to keep India united,’ Ganapathy replied. ‘Did you have breakfast?’

‘No, they woke me up.’

‘Fine. You can wash up and come over to my home, Vijaylaxmi can make a few more idlis.’

‘Thank you sir, I will be there in 30 minutes.’

Moon latched the front door, and went into the kitchen. He badly needed some coffee.

Standing near the stove was Subbaiah with a finger to the lips.

‘Sir, you are here,’ Moon whispered.

‘Yes, I hid in the cupboard, they wanted to arrest me.’

‘What for?’

‘To crush our movement, Anna and Karunanidhi have gone underground, it is time for me to disappear too.’

‘What about me?’

‘Don't worry. I will return every night and leave before sunrise. Keep the back door unlatched at all times. Just don't tell anyone, not even Ganapathy, I am beginning to suspect his behavior.’

‘For how long will this go on?’

‘As long as it takes.’

‘Moon did you close the front door?’ Subbaiah suddenly squealed.

‘Yes sir,’ Moon replied worried. ‘What about my food?’

‘It is a good thing I stocked up on noodles. They should last for at least a week. I am sure Vijaylaxmi will take pity on you and invite you to their house often. Be careful, not a word to anyone.’

‘They have invited me for breakfast now.’

‘Good. Wonder what they are having, I am starving.’

‘They said idli.’

‘Great, you should try smuggling out a few idlis. I can have them with avakaaya. Be careful, they should not suspect a thing, now hurry up.’

‘I urgently need some coffee first.’

‘Sorry, I forgot you just woke up. I will make some filter coffee for us.’

#

‘Profesor Subbaiah! I got your idlis.’

‘Good, don't shout, the neighbors will hear,’ Subbaiah emerged from the bathroom after a quiet bucket-bath. ‘Make sure the front door is locked from inside, and draw all the curtains.’

‘I have taken care sir.’

‘I am starving,’ he said, grabbing the small plastic container from Moon's hand.

‘How did you get this container? Didn't they notice?’

‘It belongs to them. They offered me more idlis and chutney for my lunch.’

‘Oh, then I better eat something else outside.’

‘No sir, I cannot eat the same food for lunch again. I can make some noodle soup later.’

‘Thanks. So what did Ganapathy say?’

‘He kept saying that he is worried for you and inquired your whereabouts.’

‘What did you tell him?’

I said you may have gone to Hyderabad to be with Madam.’

‘Fantastic, that should put him off my scent. I will have breakfast and head out, be careful, the police might make one more round again.’

‘Not to worry, I can read some of your books on the verandah. It is best to be in plain sight of the neighbors, so they do not suspect anything.’

‘That is a smart move,’ Subbaiah said, placing the idlis and chutney on his plate and taking small bites.

‘Sir, what will you do?’

‘I have to attend a few meetings and organize more protests. Our only worry is the Indian army. Although the soldiers are a bit demoralized after the war with China, they are very tough and disciplined. It will not be possible for us to break through them.’

‘Sir, aren't there many officers and soldiers from the South in the army?’

‘They form only around 20 percent of the total strength of the Indian military. No wait... they form a majority in the Madras Regiment which has been deployed here.’

‘If the people are protesting peacefully then will these soldiers fire on them unprovoked?’

‘They are trained to take orders. If Anna can have a secret meeting with South Indian officers of the Madras Regiment, maybe they will change their mind. Your questions sometimes give very good ideas!’

‘If the army joins the people then the Prime Minister cannot do anything.’

‘That is right, but the Indian army consists of many regiments, and the others will not be sympathetic to our cause. She can always send regiments from different parts of the country for duty here.’

‘Won't that take time?’

‘Yes, it will. I will propose this plan to my party,’ he said, placing the plate in the kitchen sink and washing his hands. ‘Moon, keep a watch out from the front window while I slip away from the back.’

As Moon peeped through the curtains and gave the all-clear signal, Subbaiah wrapped a towel around his face and slipped out through the back.

#

‘Young man, any news about Subbaiah?’ Ganapathy called out to Moon who had dozed off on the patio chair, a book on his tummy.

‘No sir,’ he said rubbing his eyes and glancing at his watch. It was 4 pm. ‘There is no telephone here, he may call you.’

‘Oh right, I forgot. What are you reading?’ he said pulling a chair next to him.

‘The Discovery of India,’ Moon said, handing him the book.

‘Very good choice, it was written by our first Prime Minister while he was imprisoned during our freedom movement, it is a classic.’

‘There are too many pages, and I am easily confused by all the names.’

‘Don't worry, read it carefully and you will understand our history, philosophy and culture, you will realize that we are all one race with common roots.’

‘Pakistanis and Indians also must be the same race, but they are different countries now.’

‘That is because of the divide and conquer policy of the British.’

‘Your Prime Minister appears to be following the same policy now. India may be divided again.’

‘That will not happen, the army is already here, I heard thousands of people have been arrested.’

‘How many have been killed so far?’

‘Only around 300.’

‘Only? Sir you are saying it as if more should be killed.’

‘If more are killed it will stop this nonsense.’

‘They are innocent people.’

‘Who told them to go out on the streets and protest? They are rowdies, burning public property and spreading fear. Do you have any idea of the economic loss to India? Everything has come to a standstill, factories, schools, colleges, offices, transport. Many daily wage earners may be starving.’

‘Shouldn't you be blaming the government for this situation?’

‘No, I blame Anna and his party. Even sensible people like Subbaiah have been trapped by their rhetoric. The government is not stopping economic activity. The January agitation cost us almost 5 percent of our domestic product. This time it will be more, if the army does not stop them. We are a poor country and cannot afford it at this stage of our development.’

‘The same logic could have been extended to Gandhi's protests against the British or our fight against the Japanese. I think these agitations are justified.’

‘There is a fundamental difference between freedom fighters and anarchists. I am not against protests, as long as they are peaceful.’

‘I was at Marina Beach for the first meeting which began as a peaceful movement, it was the unprovoked police firing that killed many innocent people.’

‘That is not what I heard. Many protestors attacked the police first.’

‘I was there sir. Nothing of that sort happened.’

‘Did you see the police firing first?’

‘No, I got caught in the stampede, but I heard it.’

‘How can you be sure that they were not attacked first?’

‘Professor Subbaiah told me so, and the newspaper reports also mentioned it.’

‘Newspaper reports, The Hindu, eh? Don't believe everything in that newspaper. They have their own agenda.’

‘What agenda?’

‘I do not know for sure, but I heard that they are giving financial support to Anna's party. It is some kind of an understanding they have. If DMK comes to power, they plan to diversify into other business areas. The traitors, siding with an anti-Brahmin party.’

‘Why do you call them traitors? They may be supporting a cause they believe in? I heard the newspaper played a crucial role in India's freedom struggle.’

‘That is right, but they have now lost their way. Do you know that the family, which owns The Hindu, is Iyengar? How dare they support a political party which wants to drive out Brahmins from Madras?’

‘I believe this fight is against Hindi and not Brahmins.’

‘No, you are mistaken. Hindi is just an excuse, and DMK's political agenda is still driven by anti-Brahmanism.’

A sudden shout from Vijaylaxmi interrupted their conversation. ‘There is phone call for you from Inspector Balasubramaniam.’

‘Wonder what he wants?’ Ganapathy said with a frown, his eyelids twittering.

He does look embarrassed, maybe he is a police informer as Professor Subbaiah suspected.

‘Isn't he the same inspector who contacted you when I was injured?’

‘Yes, he is my school friend, we grew up together, our families are very close. It may have something to do with his sister's wedding next month.’

Lies. Damn lies.

‘I guess I will try reading Discovery of India without falling asleep.’

‘Yes, you do that. I will check on you later in the evening.’

#

The nine o'clock BBC news offered few new developments on the situation.

Curfew had imposed in the cities of Madras, Hyderabad and Bangalore. The smaller towns and cities in the region were also tense with sporadic violence...

Many policemen, are disobeying direct orders from their senior offices, and joining the rioters...

The Indian army continues to be the only reliable force that can control the situation...

After burning government buildings and transport, some of the protestors are now targeting North Indian residential areas in Sowcarpet and shops...

Moon was keenly listening to the news in the living room, slurping on his noodle soup, having just woken up from a deep slumber, when he heard a faint knock on the door.

Must be Professor Ganapathy.

He opened the door and peeped out at the dark empty verandah, a couple of gunshots rang out in a distance, and he closed it shut immediately.

The knocking persisted, it was coming from the back. He switched on the kitchen lights to investigate, when a sharp voice startled him.

‘Switch off the lights and open the backdoor.’

It was Professor Subbaiah. He seemed furious.

‘Didn't I tell you to keep the back door open at all times?’ he barked at Moon, as the door was unlatched.

‘I am sorry sir, I forgot.’

Subbaiah was not alone. Two other stocky dark-skinned men trooped in behind him, their face wrapped in towels. They sat down on the kitchen floor, and revealed their weather beaten faces with bushy mustaches. They appeared to be in their mid-forties. Subbaiah handed them a tumbler of drinking water from the clay pot.

‘They are my party members, and will stay with us tonight,’ he told Moon. ‘Please switch off all the lights in the house, we need complete darkness.’

As the entire house dissolved into the night, Subbaiah guided the other two to the living room towards the sofa, their eyesight slowly adjusting to the darkness, while Moon stood in a corner of the room.

‘Sir, I heard there was more violence today,’ he said in a low voice.

‘The situation is out of control now. Many policemen have joined our movement, Anna is secretly meeting some Army officers tonight’ Subbaiah whispered.

‘BBC said that North Indians are being targeted in Madras.’

‘Yes, it is very unfortunate. My party is divided; one group wants to target Brahmins and North Indians. But I am totally opposed to it, as is Anna; our fight is against the government, not fellow citizens.’

‘Why doesn't Anna make an announcement and stop it.’

‘He cannot come out in the open; there is a warrant for him, and the moment he is spotted, he will be arrested. Luckily, the City Police Commissioner is a friend and alerted us, so he was able to go underground. If it gets worse, he may have to relocate to Ceylone for a few weeks.’

‘Are the police helping you?’

‘Yes, they have refused orders to fire on other Tamilians. We are now directly in combat with the Indian army. These two young men are from Andhra and Mysore, they reported that a similar situation is unfolding in their states.’ he replied. ‘Moon if you don't mind, can you wash some rice? We haven't had dinner, and can have some curd rice with avakaaya.’

‘I don't know how to make this rice, in Corea we eat a different kind of sticky rice.’

‘Don't worry just wash three cups of rice in water. I will take care of the rest.’

‘I can do that,’ Moon said, heading to the kitchen, as Subbaiah plunged into a discussion with the visitors.

When he came out a few minutes later, Moon noticed them pouring over a map in candlelight. It appeared to be a map of India, with lots of scribbling and markings. He could not understand their conversation, which was interspersed with a few familiar words: army, barracks, grenades, and rifles.

Not wanting to disturb their flow, Moon sat down on a corner chair and watched.

They were getting quite animated now, and frequently raised their voices. After 20 minutes of heated discussion, Subbaiah folded the map and turned towards Moon.

‘We will show them!’

A sudden loud knock on the door made everyone gasp.

‘Young man! Are you awake?’

‘It is Ganapathy,’ Subbaiah whispered, as he motioned the other two to follow him into the bedroom. ‘Don't allow him inside.’

A few more knocks later, Moon slowly unlatched the front door, while Subbaiah and his friends safely locked themselves in the bedroom.

‘Is everything okay with you? Why have you switched off your lights? I heard some voices.’

‘That was the radio sir. I was listening to BBC News.’

‘In candlelight?’ Ganapathy asked suspiciously, poking his head through the open gap in the door.

‘Oh that? I was not able to sleep, so decided to meditate for sometime, it is a very effective remedy in my country.’

‘I thought I heard Subbaiah's voice.’

‘He is in Hyderabad sir. How can it be possible?’

‘Anyway, Vijaylaxmi, told me to remind you of breakfast at my house tomorrow, she is very worried about your food. Did you have dinner?’

‘Yes, I made some noodle soup.’

‘Poor boy, why don't you shift to my house till Subbaiah returns? You may be lonely and hungry all by yourself.’

‘No sir, it is OK, I am able to do a lot of reading. It is good for me.’

‘Suit yourself, if you have any problems just come next door. Don't forget breakfast at 8.30 tomorrow morning. Vijaylaxmi is making upama.’

‘Thank you sir, I will be there.’

He waited until he saw Ganapathy enter his own compound, before latching the front door once again.

‘What did he want?’ Subbaiah asked, coming out of his bedroom.

‘He invited me for breakfast tomorrow.’

‘I suspect, it is not the only thing that was on his mind, he was definitely snooping around. We have to be very careful, as he will definitely inform the police.’

‘That reminds sir, he had a phone call from an inspector in the afternoon while he was chatting with me here.’

‘Inspector Bala?’

‘Yes, the inspector who helped you find me after the stampede. Is he Professor Ganapathy's childhood friend?’

‘Is that what he told you? Of course not, he has been very secretive about this association even before,’ he replied. ‘Why don't you go and sleep? I will make rice for us, and we have more work to do. We will leave at dawn, remember to keep the backdoor unlocked.’

#

When Moon woke up the next morning, all the three had disappeared. First things first, he had to make some coffee. He had observed Subbaiah making filter coffee, and memorized the Indian technique. He limped towards the backdoor which was unlatched. A few minutes later, cup of coffee in hand he opened the front door, allowing the fresh morning air to rush indoors and drive the stale smell away. No newspaper today either.

He went back indoors, with the door still open and switched on the radio, just in time for the morning news.

American President Lyndon Johnson has kicked off a broad-based review of the country's involvement in the Vietnam conflict...

With 75,000 American troops already stationed in South Vietnam, the President is weighing the options of either increasing combat strength or pulling out completely...

There are reports that USSR and Communist China have sent troops to help defend the northern reaches of North Vietnam...

In another interesting development, there is more trouble in the Asian region.

In the southern cities across India, the agitation against imposition of Hindi has intensified...

Following the lead of the police force, a section of the Indian Army appears to be sympathetic to their cause...

At midnight yesterday, a 200-strong crowd went on a rampage completely destroying a residential colony of North Indians in Sowcarpet. According to our correspondent, army soldiers present at the site refused to intervene and let the attacking crowd go. At least 12 North Indians have been burnt alive...

The top leadership of Dravida Munnetra Kazagham, Swatantara Party and the Communist Party of India, the main organizational force behind this agitation has gone underground...*Additional army troops have been sanctioned, and will be reaching the affected cities by tomorrow afternoon...*

The agitation was getting messier.

A sudden roaring noise alerted Moon, it sounded like a vehicle. He went out to the verandah, cup of coffee in hand. He was right, it was a police jeep.

The vehicle went right up to Ganapathy's house and the same inspector who had woken him the previous day stepped down, walked up to the house, glanced sideways at Moon and knocked on the door in front.

Ganapathy emerged smiling, they shook hands and went inside, carefully closing the door behind them as two constables came out of the jeep and stood watch.

Moon wanted to wait, but the coffee starting working on him and he had to rush back inside, clutching tightly at his lungi.

By the time he came out ten minutes later, relief showing on his face, the jeep had disappeared.

He decided to dig deeper during breakfast, but unfortunately, could not elicit any more details. Ganapathy avoided the subject and instead discussed the Vietnam War and its fall out in the Southeast Asian region.

‘So Moon, what is your reading of the situation? Do you think America will send more forces and defeat the North?’ Ganapathy asked, munching on a mouthful of upama.

‘I have not been following the Vietnam War sir, I am more worried about the situation here,’ Moon replied.

‘Young man, keep an open mind, you have to be aware of world developments. Listen to the radio and suck up information, it will help you sooner than later.’

‘I will try, but right now I just want the agitation here to end, so that I can go back to my own country.’

‘By the way, I just got a phone call from Subbaiah. You were right; he is in Hyderabad to organize the demonstrations there. He was inquiring about you.’

Chapter 13: THE MORNING AFTER

The alarm woke Naga up with a start. He had a splitting hangover. Under normal circumstances he would have hit the snooze button a couple of times before finally rolling out of bed. Not today. Maya was lying next to him, naked under the sheets. He felt her back with his morning stiffness and glanced over her shoulder, she was still fast asleep, a small smile wrinkling her lips.

She looks even more beautiful and fresh in the morning.

Naga turned to his side, and stared at the table clock, as it ticked away. He was no longer a virgin, and she had been very patient with his clumsy lovemaking the night before. However, he somehow did not feel right.

She may think I took advantage of her vulnerability. I better apologize.

He struggled out of bed, grabbed a pair of shorts from the closet, and hurried out of the bedroom.

The living room was a mess, and the dinner lay unpacked on the kitchen counter. Clothes were strewn all over the floor; two empty scotch bottles and half-full glasses lay on the coffee table.

He rearranged the living room, cleaned up the mess and picked up the newspapers and milk from the front door.

A hot cup of instant coffee should make me feel better.

Naga picked up The Hindu and scanned the front page. He could not focus, threw the newspaper on the floor, and opened the window for some fresh air. Feeling better, he kept staring at the distance, thinking of ways to apologize.

‘Good Morning’ Maya called out from behind him. She was dressed in different attire, a T-shirt and shorts.

‘Good morning,’ he said, without looking her in the eye.

‘What's the matter? Not feeling well?’

‘I have a terrible hangover; we had a little too much to drink last night. I am sorry for taking advantage of the situation, I could not control myself,’ he said, still staring out the window.

‘Thanks for last night,’ she replied, ‘there is absolutely no need to apologize, I needed your comfort.’

Relieved, Naga turned around, and saw a tear roll down her cheek. He rushed to her and held her in his hands, kissing her eyelids. ‘We have to call your son, remember?’

‘Yes, I do. Let me just freshen up.’

‘Take your time, I will take leave today, just cannot go to office with this headache.’

‘I have the perfect remedy for your hangover, haejangguk.’

‘What is haejangguk?’

‘It is a pork-based hangover soup that Koreans have in the morning after a night of heavy drinking. The soup will warm your stomach, and you can feel the nutrients seeping their way back into your body.’

‘Can you make some for me? I can buy some pork from the meat shop downstairs.’

‘I too could do with some, but we need Korean spices for that and the preparation will take time.’

‘I have an idea. Why don't we go to Corea Town? I am sure the restaurants will serve haejanguk. I tasted different Korean meat and soup last night.’

‘Naga! Don't be naughty,’ she said give him a gentle punch. ‘That is a good idea, I can also buy kimchi and some spices.’

‘That's settled then, we make your phone call, and then go to Corea Town for brunch and shopping. On the way back I will drop you off at the University for your meeting with the old man.’

#

‘It is amazing, my hangover's gone,’ Naga said, as he pulled out of the parking lot of Yeongyang Center in Corea Town.

‘I told you so. Haejanguk has some amazing powers. Thanks for getting me here, I was finally able to taste kimchi.’

‘Maya, I have a confession make. I was afraid of the kimchi smell, that is why I delayed getting you to Corea Town.’

‘What's wrong with the smell? It seems OK to me.’

‘Frankly, it stinks like sweaty feet,’ he replied, honking at the car ahead that was refusing to let him overtake.

‘Naga, that is insulting, you know it is our traditional food. Moreover, please don't generalize. There are more than 180 varieties of kimchi. What we had today in the restaurant was fermented for more than a year, that is why the smell was strong.’

‘180 varieties? I didn't know they had so many types of kimchi.’

‘Kimchi varieties are determined by the main vegetable ingredients and the mix of seasonings used to flavor it. Anyway, since you mentioned it, I must warn you that I will keep my kimchi in your refrigerator, so don't complain.’

Oh shit!

‘No problem, I will get used to it.’

‘Naga can you hurry up, I do not want to be late for the meeting with Professor Ganapathy.’

‘There are CCTVs everywhere monitoring the speed of vehicles. We will reach on time, don't worry, the expressway will be empty this time of the day.’

#

Professor Ganapathy was waiting for Maya on the same bench he had left her the previous day. He was in a bad mood. Throughout his career, he had laid emphasis on punctuality, reminding his students that it shows respect for other people and their time, and expected others to return the courtesy.

An unexpected traffic jam had caught Naga unawares, and it took an hour to cross the last milestone. As soon as his car screeched to a halt, Maya jumped out and ran towards the university gates. Naga had switched on her pen-recorder and put it in her purse. ‘Don't forget to leave your purse slightly open, and speak loudly,’ he reminded her.

Approaching the bench, she noticed Ganapathy scowling.

‘I am extremely sorry sir, I had gone to Corea Town and got caught in a traffic jam on the way back.’

‘That is no excuse young lady. An appointment is an appointment, this is the last time I will tolerate it.’

‘I understand, although it was not my fault it will not be repeated again.’

‘How did you find Corea Town? Reminded you of home?’

‘Made me a little homesick. I could speak Korean after a long time and finally taste kimchi here.’

‘Kimchi...yes I remember. I developed a taste for it during my time in Seoul. As Subbaiah used to say, it is like a magnet, that zaps you and holds on.’

‘Did you enjoy your time in Seoul.’

‘I had only three problems; weather, language and identifying people.’

‘What do you mean identifying people?’ Maya asked puzzled.

‘I got very easily confused between the Chinese, Koreans and Japanese.’

‘I too cannot differentiate between Dravidians, Hindustanis and Pakistanis. I get confused.’

‘I guess you are right. That is because we are the same race. Seriously, how do you identify if the person is Chinese or Japanese?’

‘There are no fixed rules; we just see people and we can tell them apart. Most Chinese have rounder faces, and Japanese have angular faces, while Koreans have a mix of the two, we are also taller,’ she said. ‘Sir, can you tell me about your time in Seoul?’

‘Oh yes, I taught there for a year in 1975. I was invited as an exchange professor to teach economics at Seoul National University. You may not have been born then.’

‘I take that as a compliment. I am much older than you think.’

‘I won’t ask you your age. As they say, never ask a woman her age and a man his salary.’

‘Where did you stay? On campus?’

‘No, I stayed with a friend near the university?’

‘A Korean friend?’

‘No, a Dravidian friend, he was my colleague in Madras University and he too had come on an exchange program to teach in Seoul,’ he said staring at the clouds.

‘What was his name?’

Ganapathy looked straight in her eyes and said ‘Venkat, his full name was Venkataramaiah.’

‘I would like to meet him also sir. His experience in Seoul may help my research. Can you give me his contact information?’

‘That will be of no use, he passed away last year.’

‘Oh, I am sorry.’

‘How did you find the Korean students?’ she continued trying to deviate his attention.

‘Very intelligent, although they had difficulty in following my accent, and were very hardworking.’

‘My father had the same problem when he came to study here, but he often tells me that it was one of the best periods of his student life.’

‘Your father studied in Madras University? What did he study? When was it?’

‘He came here in 1965 to study economics, but the civil war started and he had to leave in a few months time. Luckily, he could transfer to an exchange program in Kyoto University, so he could complete the course.’

‘Are you Moon's daughter?’ Ganapathy screamed.

‘Yes sir, my father's name is Choi Moon-kyu.’

‘Wow! What a small world, Moon's daughter. I knew you looked familiar, fantastic, great. How is he doing?’

‘Did you know him?’

‘Of course I did. He was my student and stayed in Subbaiah's house during the riots. The young man asked too many questions, just like you.’

‘I hear Subbaiah fought in the civil war.’

‘Call him Professor Subbaiah young lady. Yes, he was one of the front leaders and organized all the students, not just in Madras but also in Andhra. You didn't tell me, what is Moon doing now?’

‘He teaches at Pyongyang Institute of Development Studies. My mother is also a professor in the same institute.’

‘So love marriage, eh?’

‘Yes, they met while doing their Ph.D in Kyoto University.’

‘Is she Japanese by any chance?’

‘Yes sir, she is from Osaka.’

‘What an irony, he hated Japanese and Chinese here at the University, and never mixed with them. Anyway, that explains your looks. You have sharp features, more like Japanese, but unlike them you are also tall. I heard that Korean women are beautiful and the Japanese men handsome. Is it true?’

‘That is what they say,’ she replied. ‘Can you tell a little more of Professor Subbaiah?’

‘Why do you want to know?’

‘I just wanted to know how my father spent his time in Madras during the agitation.’

‘He was mostly indoors, and alone in Subbaiah's house eating his noodle soup and reading Discovery of India, that he never completed. Subbaiah was underground, as there was an arrest warrant for him, and his wife was away in Hyderabad. Poor Moon used to come to our home for breakfast everyday, and I am sure that is the only good meal he had. We told him to have lunch and dinner, but he would not listen, so my wife used to make extra breakfast and pack the rest for him to take home. Later of course he had all his meals at our place.’

‘Didn't you join the agitation?’

‘I do not believe in violence. I initially feared that they were not just against Hindi but also against Brahmins.’

‘Was it true? Were the Brahmins targeted?’

‘Not physically, only verbally during the first phase of the war, later, we had no problems. Anna and our first President MGR ensured that the Brahmins were treated equally. If that fellow Karunanidhi had become President, one never knows what would have happened.’

‘Isn't Anna the father of your nation?’

‘Yes he is, great man, very compassionate towards everyone. From the beginning, he was against violence, but his deputy Karunanidhi pushed for violence.’

‘Why didn't Anna become the first President?’

‘He was against power, just like Mahatma Gandhi. Also he died of a heart attack soon after independence. Karunanidhi was our President for the interim, after the war.’

‘I thought MGR was your first President.’

‘He was the first elected President. After independence, an interim government was in charge till our constitution was drafted. Our first elections were held in November 1970, and the elected President took office in January 1971.’

‘What happened to Karunanidhi? Why didn't he become President?’

‘He lost to MGR in the primaries. We decided to follow the American electoral model, but with direct elections without electoral colleges. Every party has primaries to select their candidate. Karunanidhi stood against MGR and lost.’

‘What is he doing now?’

‘How can you keep asking so many questions? Does it run in your entire family?’

‘Sorry sir, it will help me understand the country and aid in my research.’

‘OK then. Karunanidhi retired from politics after his defeat, to concentrate on writing movie scripts and books. He is very old now, but still remains an influential man, and everyone from the party consults with him before taking any decision.’

‘Sir, did Professor Subbaiah play an important role in the government?’

‘He would have been Dravida's first Finance Minister, but they did not allow him?’

‘Who did not allow him?’

‘The MGR faction in the party was against him. Subbaiah was a Karunanidhi supporter after the war, and was even member of the constitution drafting committee.’

‘You mean Naga's dad drafted your constitution?’

‘Who is Naga?’ Ganapathy asked, raising his eyebrow.

‘My friend, who met you in the library?’

‘Nagabhushan, that Hindu reporter is Subbaiah's son? Why didn't you say so?’

‘Nagarjuna sir, you told me not to get him to our meeting,’ she reminded him.

‘That's because he is a reporter and asked too many questions, I didn't know he is my best friend's son. I saw him when he was a baby.’

‘Sir, he is very curious to find out about his father's whereabouts. He does not believe that Professor Subbaiah defected to Hindustan.’

‘That is a long story.’

‘Do you know what happened to him?’

‘Forty years ago...times have changed. I would like to meet Subbaiah's son tomorrow. Can you get him here, same time?’ Ganapathy asked, ‘I hope his mother is doing well, she made excellent sambar!’

‘I will ask him, actually he will come to pick me up, and he may already be at the entrance, you can meet him now.’

‘No, no, not today, I have another appointment and have to leave now.’

‘Thank you sir, I will meet you with Naga tomorrow.’

Gananpathy got up without saying a word and walked away at a brisk pace, tapping his walking stick on the pavement with force.

Maya picked up her bag, switched off the pen-recorder and walked towards the University entrance gates.

Naga will be pleased. I have so much information.

As she approached the gates, she saw his car and ran towards it. He was busy nodding his head to some music playing on the stereo.

Opening the car door, she slid next to him in the front, and placed a wet passionate kiss on his lips.

He was slightly taken aback, and afraid that someone would notice. Public display of affection was something that he avoided.

‘You seem to be very happy.’

‘Of course,’ she replied placing her hand on his lap. ‘You have no idea what information I have got for you.’

‘You mean about my father?’

‘Yes, you should listen to the recording. Professor Ganapathy wants to meet you tomorrow and give you more information.’

‘He knows about me?’

‘I told him. He also gave me some information about my father when he came here on the exchange program.’

‘Wow, that is some great detective work.’

‘You know how to repay me,’ she winked.

‘I hope you recorded the whole conversation, let us go home and listen to it,’ Naga replied blushing.

#

Naga played the recording over and over again on his audio system, reclining on the sofa and scribbling notes on a pad, while Maya leaned her head against his shoulder, gently caressing his thighs.

‘Maya, please stop it. Let me concentrate.’

‘Promise me my reward and I will stop.’

‘OK I promise you,’ he said, even as he was tempted to pounce on her and suck her luscious lips right then. ‘You did a great job.’

‘There are still a few missing links. I do not think he was telling the entire truth.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘He said he went to Seoul in 1975, the same year as my father disappeared. We have to find out if it is true. We also need to find out the whereabouts of his Indian colleague who accompanied him, Venkatramaiah. Lastly, he said that my father supported Karunanidhi, which is not true, my father has clearly mentioned in his diary that he supported MGR.’

‘Do you want me to email my professor in Corea and find out about his exchange program in 1975.’

‘Will he be able to give us the details?’

‘Of course, he did his PhD from SNU and he has powerful connections in the university.’

‘Great, that will be very helpful. Since I am meeting Professor Ganapathy tomorrow, I can find out more discrepancies in his stories. I am sure he is hiding something.’

‘Fine, now give me my reward,’ she said, as she pounced on him.

The loud buzz of the doorbell interrupted their foreplay.

‘Who can it be?’ Naga said, glancing at the wall clock. It was eight o’ clock.

‘Did you order any food?’

‘No, it slipped my mind,’ he said walking towards the front door. ‘Daai, Sunder! You came early, I was expecting you tomorrow.’

‘I thought of surprising you,’ his roommate said, dragging his luggage to the corner room. Your Korean friend here?’

Yes, she is in the living room. Why don't you freshen up, I will introduce you.’

‘Sure thing.’

Naga hurried back to the living room. ‘Sunder is back. He came earlier than expected.’

‘Good for you, he can find out about Ganapathy and his colleague.’

‘Yes, but it also means we have to stop fooling around. There goes our privacy.’

‘I can always sneak into your room at night,’ she said, adjusting her hair, as she noticed Sunder walk into the living room.

He looked younger than his photograph. Although the grey hair did give him a scholarly look, she noticed that he was younger in real life.

‘Sunder, meet Maya. Maya, Sunder my roommate,’ Naga introduced them.

‘So how are you finding Madras? The last time Naga called, he said that your research has been progressing well.’

‘Yes it has, but I think we need your help to resolve some other issues.’

‘You mean Professor Ganapathy?’

‘There is more,’ Naga interrupted, ‘why don't you take a shower and relax, you look pretty tired.’

‘Yes, it was a tiring trip; my flight was delayed by about four hours because of a bomb hoax. Have you had dinner?’

‘No, we were just about to order. You want any?’

‘I have a better idea, why don't we drive down to my family restaurant. It's my dad's birthday, one reason I came early.’

‘It will be a good opportunity for Maya to meet them. She was curious about life in Hindustan.’

‘Fine, let me just freshen up. I will call them and ask them to get dinner for three ready. By the way, I have to warn you Maya, my dad talks a lot, you may be bored to death.’

‘That is fine with me, the more he talks the merrier.’

‘I will brief you on new developments in the car,’ Naga said.

#

Taj Mahal was one of the finest North Indian restaurants in Madras. Situated in a glitzy corner of Triplicane, the mouthwatering vegetarian cuisine was cooked by Hindustani defectors. With a seating capacity of 40, it was not big by commercial standards, but the authentic Hindustani food drew huge crowds everyday, mostly expatriates and tourists, but also the occasional Dravidian families who wanted a break from curd rice and sambar.

It was a good thing that Sunder alerted his parents. As soon as they arrived, they were ushered to their table, much to the envy of the long line of onlookers who had been waiting for close to 30 minutes.

‘My parents will be here soon, we can have some fresh juice.’

‘Don't they serve wine here? I could do with some white wine and meat.’

‘I'm sorry Maya, my parents are strict Brahmins and condone alcohol. This restaurant only serves vegetarian dishes cooked in the authentic Awadhi style.’

‘Awadhi cuisine is from the city of Lucknow, which is the capital of his parents province, Uttar Pradesh in Hindustan. Although the non-vegetarian dishes are more popular, the vegetarian food is equally delicious,’ Naga added.

‘Here he comes,’ Sunder got up from his seat, and touched the feet of an old man who was approaching their table. His head was shaven, except for a tiny ponytail that reached his shoulders, and was wearing a dhoti and kurta.

‘That is his dad, it is a Hindustani custom to touch the feet of elders as a mark of respect.’

Bringing him to their table, Sunder introduced Maya.

‘Hello Uncle, how is business? How is Auntie's health?’ Naga asked.

‘Everything is fine, by the grace of God. Auntie had to visit a friend's house, they just had a grand daughter,’ Vinay responded, then turning to Maya he continued, ‘I heard you are here for some research.’

‘Yes uncle, I came 10 days ago.’

‘How long will you be here?’

‘I initially planned for a month, but may stay longer if my work is not finished.’

‘Naga, you should take her to other provinces, she should experience the different cultures here. I remember my roommate in University was from Korea, poor chap could not see any other province and had to leave within a month.’

‘Why, what happened?’ Naga asked.

‘The civil war broke out,’ he said staring into Maya's eyes. ‘I know all Koreans look alike to us, but your friend does have some resemblance with my former roommate.’

‘Pitaji, we are all very hungry,’ Sunder said.

‘Sure. Your mother has already chosen the menu for our dinner, it should be ready by now. Why don't you talk to Manager Abhay?’

As Sunder got up to go to talk to the manager, Maya asked, ‘Was there a lot of violence in your city during the war?’

‘No, not much, it is in the heartland of Hindustan. The violence was mainly in the four provinces in Dravida.’

‘Then why did your Corean roommate leave?’

‘It was here in Madras. I studied at Madras University, but had to return home because of the war. I later completed my degree in Delhi, now renamed Delhi.’

‘So you are speaking about your hostel roommate at Madras University in 1965?’

‘Absolutely. He asked a lot of questions and kept arguing with me. The strange thing is, he was my roommate but hardly slept in the room, and disappeared every night only to reappear in the morning. I could not get to know him better, and by the time we were getting friendly, the war broke out.’

‘Was your room mate’s name Choi Moon-kyu by any chance?’

‘No, I don't think so; it was Moon Kim or something like that. We used to call him Moon.’

‘That's the same. He was my father. He mentioned to me that his roommate was from North India,’ she said, without revealing that he also told her that he was an obnoxious racist.

‘Jai Shri Ram. Unbelievable. I am meeting my roommate’s daughter after 40 years. Glad that he escaped back home. What is he doing now?’

‘He teaches economics in Corea.’

‘So he ended up well.’

Sunder returned with the manager, who promised to get dinner started in a few minutes, as the waiters started laying the table. It was difficult to carry on further conversation, what with the constant interruptions, so Vinay started catching up on Sunder's life and activities. The father-son talk soon veered to the familiar topic of marriage, which only seemed to infuriate Sunder, but he kept quite mumbling his protests.

‘His parents want him to marry another defectors daughter, a Hindustani Brahmin, but Sunder's girlfriend is a Goa Christian,’ Naga whispered to Maya.

‘What is a Goa Christian, is it another sect like the ones Ruby and Mathew belong to?’

‘No, Goa is part of Karnataka province, it used to be a separate region ruled by the Portugese from 1510 to 1961, when it was annexed by the Indian army. After the civil war, it became a part of Dravida. His girlfriend is catholic.’

‘Why are his parents against Sunder's girlfriend?’

‘They are conservative Brahmins and do not want any relationship with a Christian family. They believe that Christians are impure because they eat beef and drink wine.’

‘My father had mentioned that his roommate was a racist and hated Dravidians for their dark skin. Isn't it ironic that he had to escape to Dravida for a better life?’ she muttered under her breath.

‘It is, why don't you ask him why he came here? Let us see what he says. By the way, Sunder is the complete opposite of his father and is very liberal in his views.’

As the waiters left the table, Maya looked at the spread in front of her. The food looked delicious and the spices smell was exotic. However, as Sunder started rattling off the names she was confused: Navratan Korma, Arbi ke Kebab, Rajma

Galoti Kebab, Tehri, Naan, Lachha Paratha, Rumali Roti... the list seemed endless, and she decided to observe Naga to follow his eating etiquette.

‘Uncle, when did you come to Dravida?’

‘I came here in March 1975, when Sunder was just a kid. As you probably know, my father got into trouble with the authorities because some Muslim peasants hid in our house during the riots.’

‘Naga told me that he protected them from a Hindu mob which attacked their houses.’

‘That is not entirely true. We did not even know that they were hiding in our house, someone saw them climb the walls and informed the police. We tried to reason with the authorities, but the officer in charge wanted money, which my father refused to pay, so he was hauled to prison.’

‘What was the harm if Muslims were hiding in your house? Their life was in danger,’ Maya asked.

‘That is not what the government tolerates. Minorities are considered non grata, Muslims are considered as Pakistani agents and Christians as Dravidian agents.’

‘I hear there are around 110 million Muslims and 15 million Christians in Hindustan. Why don't they all join together and fight for their rights?’

‘Maya, it is not very easy. Hindustan is a totalitarian state. I fully backed Indira when she became the Prime Minister, but after the civil war, she became increasingly insecure. She did not tolerate any dissent, and her political opponents were all sent to prison. Many innocent people like my father were caught in the cross-fire.’

‘Do you think the situation has changed, now that she is dead?’

‘No it will only get worse. Her younger son who became the President is even more insecure. The only way of retaining power is through creating fear in the minds of people and reminding them of some imaginary foreign hand. It helps that Pakistan and Dravida, the two biggest enemies are neighbors on either side.’

‘Don't you think if Hindustan had followed Dravida's example and become a true democracy it could have developed?’

‘I do believe it now, having lived here for so many years.’

‘What about the personality cult in Hindustan?’

‘I support the Nehru family, and find no harm in it, but dynastic politics should be followed only in a true democracy. If the people truly want the dynasty to stay in power, no one can object. The situation is different now, and the people have no say. It is the military which is the most powerful government organization.’

Sunder's father was not as obnoxious as her father had told her. Maybe reality had put him back on track, she thought, as the conversation continued for more than an hour longer.

Although she found it hard to believe many of the stories of atrocities narrated by Sunder's father, she knew that he was not lying.

Chapter 14: OUT OF CONTROL

The breakfast was delicious as usual, but Moon came back with no new information, besides the fact that Subbaiah had called up, pretending to be in Hyderabad. No leads as to why the inspector had visited Ganapathy's house.

He placed the container with the extra upama that Vijaylaxmi had packed for his lunch in the kitchen, and switched on the radio. Grabbing the Discovery of India from his room, he went to the verandah to relax.

Moon flipped through the book and reached page 61, which he had bookmarked earlier by folding a corner of the page. Ten minutes later, he felt his eyelids growing heavy.

Damn, why do I fall asleep whenever I read this book?

He sat up in his chair and decided to start reading all over again. This time he decided to read aloud.

‘The diversity of India is tremendous; it lies on the surface and anybody can see it. It concerns itself with physical appearances as well as with certain mental habits and traits. There is little in common, to outward seeming, to Pathan of the North-West and Tamil in the far South. Their racial stocks are not the same; though there may be common strands running through them; they differ in face and figure, food and clothing, and of course language...’

Hearing a noise, he looked up to see four men walking towards Ganapathy's house. They were all partially naked, with just a white cloth wrapped around their waists. All of them had a thread strung around their shoulders, just like Vinay, and were arguing loudly in Tamil.

They are Brahmins.

One of them went up to the door and knocked. Ganapathy emerged, only to receive a barrage of abuses from them. They were scolding him and even raised their fists, in threat. Vijaylaxmi came out and tried to pacify them, but they would not calm down. After a few minutes of intense shouting and cursing, they abruptly turned around and left.

Moon was now standing on the porch, ready to intervene in case the situation got out of hand. Although he was a foreigner and stood no chance as a mediator, he realized that his physical presence would be some support to Ganapathy. He noticed that Vijaylaxmi was sobbing, while Ganapathy was trying to console her. As the four visitors turned the corner and disappeared, he walked up to their house.

‘Sir, is everything all right?’

‘Moon, glad you are here.’

‘Who were those men?’

‘They are priests from the Kapaleeshwarar Temple in Mylapore. They warned me not to support Anna's party and threatened to excommunicate us.’

‘You don't support Anna, why should they warn you?’

‘Moon take a seat,’ he said, pointing towards a chair, as Vijaylaxmi went inside wiping her tears with the end of her sari. ‘I have something important to tell you.’

Confused, he sat down, while Ganapathy continued.

‘Anna's party started as an anti-Brahmin movement, but the developments over the past few days has made them reorient their strategy. They are no longer against the Tamil Brahmins, and want everyone to support their cause against the imposition of Hindi.’

‘So it means that all Brahmins have decided to support Anna? Then why did the Temple Trustees threaten you?’

‘It is not so simple. Many educated Brahmins are of the opinion that we should support Anna, but the government supporters have convinced a few powerful priests that our community will be thrown out of the state if Anna's party is successful in repealing English. Along with Inspector Bala, I am trying to form an association of Brahmins that will support Anna's movement.’

‘Why this sudden change of heart?’

‘The violence over the past few days has really shocked us. We did not expect the government to be so ruthless towards its own people. Innocent people in all the southern states are dying. Even the police and army unit that has been sent here have joined Anna's movement and refused to fire at their own citizens. Fresh units from the North Indian regiments are on their way, and if they succeed, it will be catastrophic. We have the upper hand now, and we need to consolidate it by showing a united front. I wanted to speak to Subbaiah and coordinate our efforts, but unfortunately he is in Hyderabad. I could not explain this to him on the phone because the government could be spying on me.’

Could it be a ruse to get more information from me?

‘Sir what do you want to tell Professor Subbaiah when he comes back?’

‘There are many people from our community in the government who want to support Anna if we can assure them of a victory. I want to discuss a strategy to engineer mass defections. If the executive branch supports Anna along with the armed forces, Indira will be helpless. The local media is also with us, and we hope the judiciary joins.’

‘What about the state legislators?’

‘The Congress Party has a majority in the state, and the national assembly members do not want to lose power. That is why Anna is concentrating on the other important pillars of our democracy.’

‘Sir, will you be actively joining the movement now?’

‘Vijaylaxmi doesn't want me to, but I am trying to convince her. Religion is a very important aspect of her life and she doesn't want our family to be excommunicated.’

‘What will happen if you are excommunicated from Hinduism?’

‘Unlike other religions, Hinduism is not a monolithic religion, so the concept of excommunication does not mean that you can throw us out of the religion. However, if the Temple Trustees decide, we can lose our caste status. As a Brahmin, caste is very important for us, as we will otherwise be considered untouchables. They warned us that they will not accept any form of repentance, so we cannot get back into fold once again.’

‘So you will not be able to go to the temples and mix with other Brahmins. Does it make a difference?’

‘It is the worst that could happen to a Brahmin. As you know, we are the custodians of dharma. Moreover, we are Deekshitar Iyers, a sub-sect that descended from three thousands sages who were performing tapas in Kailasam, Lord Shiva's abode. We were nearly wiped out in the 14th century, and no one wants that to happen again.’

‘You mean your sect was destroyed and has risen again?’

‘There was a civil war in 1312, and a majority of the serving priests were pressured to compromise on their beliefs. They chose to give up their lives by jumping down

from tall pagodas, some escaped to Kerala while the remaining got absorbed into other communities. So it is a very emotional matter for us.'

'What are you going to do?'

'I do not believe in the caste system, and am actually agnostic. Vijaylaxmi is deeply religious and I cannot upset her. Do you know that I eat non-vegetarian, but she is unaware of it?'

'Is that the reason you have always been arguing with Professor Subbaiah about Brahmanism, to send out a wrong public impression about your beliefs.'

'That is right, but it is now time to stand up for my beliefs. I have to convince Vijaylaxmi that I want to fight for the greater good of our society.'

The telephone rang and Ganapathy got up, but hearing Vijaylaxmi attend to it he sat down again. She shouted out from inside, 'Anna is calling from Delhi, he has something important to tell you.'

'Is it Anna?' Moon asked.

'It is her brother Damodaran, anna means elder brother in Tamil,' he replied going inside.

Sitting on the patio, Moon realized that the situation was now getting worse. He heard animated discussion on the phone and wondered what it could be.

Ten minutes later, Ganapathy emerged with a grim face.

'The situation is getting out of control. South Indians are being attacked in Delhi. R.K.Puram is burning and more than 60 people have died. The police are not intervening, and many families have started taking the first train out of the city.'

Rama Krishna Puram, also known as R.K.Puram for short was a Central Government Employees residential colony in South West Delhi. It was built in the

second phase of extension of the capital city, and contained double-storey housing blocks. Many of the South Indian government officers were allocated accommodation in this colony, which was still under extension. Construction work was still ongoing in a couple of sectors.

‘Are Damodaran anna and his family all right? They stay in R K Puram,’ Vijaylaxmi asked, walking behind him.

‘Yes, he is fine, Sector 2 was not attacked. Most of casualties are in Sector 5 but he said that everyone is living in fear. Even he is considering moving to Madras for a few days.’

‘Why are they attacking South Indians?’

‘It could be revenge attacks. Two days ago, a few North Indian houses and shops were attacked in Sowcarpet. Anna put a stop to it, but obviously, the word has reached Delhi.’

‘Have they also attacked South Indian shops?’

‘There are very few South Indian shops in Delhi. Most of the South Indians there are government officers. Damodaran was mentioning that mobs belonging to the Congress party carried iron rods, knives, clubs, and combustible material, including kerosene. They arbitrarily killed any South Indian men or women they could find, ransacking and burning their houses.’

‘How can they distinguish South Indian's? Everyone looks the same to me?’

‘They are making people speak in Hindi before attacking them. A pronounced South Indian accent is enough to make the mob wild.’

‘That is terrible,’ Vijaylaxmi said putting her right palm to the mouth.

‘I am afraid, it will be as bad as Partition, only this time, the government appears to be directly involved. They are not even reporting it on radio, so no one is aware of the ground situation. All foreign reporters have been placed under house arrest, so BBC News may not be of much help.’

‘Don't you think if word spreads here, the agitators will resume attacking North Indians?’ she asked.

‘I hope not, but one can never say. An angry mob can never be controlled with reason and logic.’

‘The hostel has closed, so where are all the North Indian students in the university?’ she asked concerned.

‘All of them left for their hometowns on the first day, including my roommate Vinay,’ Moon replied.

‘I have told Damodaran to call me every two hours, just so we know that his family is safe. He will also keep updating me on the situation. Meanwhile, I only hope that our people do not attack the North Indians here.’

‘Sir, I have a small confession to make, Professor Subbaiah is not in Hyderabad.’

‘What do you mean? He rang me up from there.’

‘That was because he suspected you were spying on him for the government.’

‘Is that what he told you? I am his best friend, I could never do that.’

‘To be fair to him, you were very friendly with the police inspector,’ Moon tried defending Subbaiah. ‘He has been coming back home every night and leaving in the morning.’

‘Then I should meet him, he will have more information on the situation here. I need to know what the plan is, so that I can organize the other Brahmin friends.’

‘OK sir, I will inform you, when he comes home tonight. I think I will go home and complete my book.’

‘I have a better idea. As soon as he comes please bring him here for dinner. He must be missing home-cooked meals, as Malathi is away. We can also call up Damodaran and get the latest update.’

#

Moon spent the entire afternoon lazing around on the verandah, gazing at the cloud formations and making the occasional effort to read Discovery of India. It was futile.

BBC News did not offer much new information, and there was no mention of the horrific attacks in R.K.Puram. All India Radio made it appear as though the government was firmly in control of the situation. There was also mention of a few attacks on North Indians in Madras, Coimbatore, Hyderabad and Bangalore. Nothing on the revenge attacks in Delhi.

He had upama for lunch and felt a little full. It was four hours since he left Ganapathy’s house, and decided to go for a small walk on the campus grounds to digest his lunch. It would also help him exercise his limbs, as he wanted to flee the country as soon as possible.

Moon had been told that the entire staff quarters was surrounding by a brick wall, with only two entrances, one in the front and the other in the back, both were closed and the police were keeping a watch. Although there were a few North Indian families still living on campus, the agitators did not bother and neither did the army.

I wonder how Professor Subbaiah manages to sneak in every night.

As he approached the common playground, he saw a couple of children frolicking in the sun, oblivious to the turmoil outside. They seemed happy that their school had been closed indefinitely, and were shouting at the top of their voices, chasing each other with imaginary swords.

A group of youngsters were playing hockey on a small patch of grass and three young girls with cheap plastic dolls in their hands were chatting underneath a tree.

He sat down on a wooden bench in the shade and watched the hockey match in progress. Most of the kids were barefooted and only a few had proper hockey clubs, the rest were holding out stubs of palm leaves, but that hardly dampened their spirits and they were having the time of their lives.

Children are so innocent. They do not burden their heads with trivial matters like caste, religion or language. It is only after they grow up that they start differentiating their friends.

Moon suddenly missed his childhood in Masan, playing jegichagi with friends. Actually, the day his parents died in the demonstration against the government, he had been busy playing with his friends on the school grounds. Just like these kids here, he had not concerned himself with the agitation against President Rhee and the violence that followed.

His mind wandered to his childhood days and his sudden relocation to Seoul at the tender age of fifteen. His mother's brother had been kind enough to provide him shelter, but was too poor to pay for his education. Moon had to do odd jobs and saved enough money to complete his education. Luckily he got a scholarship to study at Seoul National University, which finally brought him for a year to Madras.

Now with the agitation getting stronger, he was afraid he would have to return back to Seoul midway.

There were only two things that worried him now. Getting back to Seoul at the earliest, and transferring to another foreign university for his exchange program.

He was slowly recovering from the injuries suffered during the stampede, but his cast could only be taken off after he returns home.

This time I will try to go to a university closer home, maybe China or Japan. At least our culture, food and climate are the same. My mistake, I should have made friends with the Chinese and Japanese here, they seemed cordial and would have guided me. It is always a mistake to carry over the historical legacy of mistrust when we are dealing with people.

He was still lost in thoughts, when a child's voice called out for his attention.

‘Uncle, are you from China?’

A small girl in ponytails was staring at him.

He smiled and without realizing why, he lied, ‘No, I am from Nagaland.’

‘Is it close to Japan?’ she asked.

‘No, it is in India. I am also Indian like you.’

‘You cannot be. You look so different from us. My mother said that if you lie you go to narak.’

‘Where are you from?’ he asked, realizing that she had fair skin.

‘I am from Punjab, my papa is a professor here.’

‘You look different from Tamilians, but you are also Indian,’ he said.

‘That is true,’ she said and ran away.

‘It is not just kids; even older people don't consider people from Nagaland as Indians because of their Mongolian features. I wonder how many years it will take

from Indians to recognize them as their own countrymen?’ he thought, remembering the stories of discrimination that his friend Andy had narrated.

He got up from the bench and decided to walk for a while before going back home. His body needed more exercise, and the faster he recovered, the greater his chances of returning to Korea.

A brisk thirty minutes walk later he was back on the patio, drying his sweat.

Seeing him, Ganapathy came out of his house. ‘So you decided to get some fresh air?’ he shouted out.

‘Yes, I wanted some exercise so my body can recover. I hope to return to Korea as soon as possible.’

‘Worried, eh? You should be. I just got a call from Damodaran. The situation is getting worse. More South Indian colonies have been attacked. He estimates that around 200 people have been killed, but there is no curfew, mobs are free to roam around with swords and knives. A few South Indian temples have also been destroyed.’ Ganapathy paced himself towards Moon.

‘How can the government allow it?’

‘That is their way of controlling the agitation here. They do not realize that it could boomerang once the information becomes public. It is bound to slip out, many people have telephones here.’

‘What about the situation in Madras? We have no information, although we are in the center of the city.’

‘A few friends called me and said that the violence is continuing. Many government buildings have been burnt, and buses are off the roads, but luckily the

train service is still running. Fourteen people have immolated themselves in front of Fort St. George.’

‘Sir, I can never understand this concept of self-immolation as a form of protest.’

‘I thought it is very common in East Asia. Buddhist monks have been immolating themselves for centuries. It is only recently that the western media has caught on to this concept, after Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc immolating himself in protest of the Vietnamese Ngo Dinh Diem regime in 1963.’

‘It is not common in Korea. No one immolated themselves during the April Revolution.’

‘I thought Buddhism was a prominent religion in your country. Wait...I get it, self-immolation is tolerated by some elements of Mahayana Buddhism and Hinduism, but Korea must be having Theravada Buddhists.’

‘No, we also follow Mahayana Buddhism. That is why I am surprised.’

‘Well, then maybe it has something to do with the intensity of political repression in the countries where the victims don't mind immolating themselves. Like so many things in the world, this also cannot be easily explained,’ Ganapathy said.

‘Anyway, I just wanted to remind you to get Subbaiah over to our house for dinner tonight.’

‘I will sir, but I have no idea when he will turn up. Sometimes he comes with guests.’

‘That is fine we will have our dinner on schedule. Vijaylaxmi can heat up the food for Subbaiah. She will also pack some extra food for his guests, if need be.’

#

Subbaiah slipped in alone through the backdoor unnoticed at around nine. It helped that earth's natural satellite was hiding behind some clouds.

Moon was closeted in the living room, having closed all the windows and the front door to keep the mosquitoes out. He had made the mistake of keeping a window open at sunset the previous day and had a terrible time with mosquitoes who sneaked in for their meal. He had just switched off the radio and was trying to read his book in the dim glow of the incandescent light bulb.

Subbaiah peeked at him from the dark kitchen, and realizing the coast was clear, whistled softly. Moon saw him, and as if on cue, shut off the lights and lit a candle.

‘How was your day? Any more policemen came sniffing around for me?’

‘No sir, but I have a lot of new information. Professor Ganapathy is not a government spy and wants to actually join your movement,’ Moon replied.

He gave a vivid account of the day's developments, wrapping it up with details of the revenge killings in Delhi.

‘We have to be careful. It could be just a ruse to get me over to his place. Did you notice anyone going to his house in the evening?’

‘No sir, I came inside at six thirty because of the mosquitoes. I did not hear any vehicles.’

‘They could have parked it at the entrance and walked here. I know Ganapathy is a good friend, but when it comes to caste matters, one never knows what he will be forced to do. Community ties are stronger than friendships in this part of the country.’

‘Do you mean to say that he may deceive you and get you arrested? That seems unlikely, he was genuinely concerned.’

‘You may be right, but I do not want to take any chances. Please go ahead of me and see if there is anyone in his house. If you notice anything suspicious, make an excuse and come back here. I will give ten minutes and then follow you.’

‘What should I tell them?’

‘Say that I am taking a bath now, and sent you ahead to get the food heated, I am feeling very hungry.’

Moon closed the front door behind him as Subbaiah slipped into the bathroom, and approached Ganapathy's house, straining his ears to catch any new voices in the silence of the night. Subbaiah's caution was unfounded, as there was no one in the house, except for the couple.

After he delivered his excuse for coming alone, Vijaylaxmi went into the kitchen, while Ganapathy told him to take a seat.

‘Sir, did you get any more calls from your brother-in-law?’

‘No, he was supposed to call me an hour ago. We are getting slightly worried. In the last call he mentioned that many of his neighbors had left for their hometowns.’

‘Professor Subbaiah may have more information on the situation here. He appeared to be more relaxed than yesterday.’

‘Then I guess Anna has managed to get more support from other sections of the society. I only hope he consolidates his position before more innocent lives are lost.’

The news that Subbaiah shared over dinner was indeed positive for the movement.

There was an outpouring of anger in all the four southern states and people were taking to the streets with the backing of the local police and some sections of the army. The rank and file of the Madras Regiment had deserted with their arms and

ammunitions, but many of the officers who were from North India still remained loyal. Anna had convinced a few South Indian officers to break away and command the deserters. A sort of amateur local army was in the works. Now, the South Indians in the Air Force and Navy had to be worked on.

Frequent clashes were taking place between anti and pro Hindi supporters, with the former outnumbering the latter. This would decidedly change once the rest of the army units made their way south.

Many of the Congress politicians from the southern states had pledged their support secretly, with the intention of protecting their assets, and those who did not, fled to Delhi. The country was slowly getting polarized, but surprisingly none of the other non-Hindi speaking states had shown any inclination to join the agitation. They were still holding on their sense of patriotism. The next few days were crucial for the movement.

More importantly, the international community was now starting to get involved. The United States, United Kingdom and France had called for restraint. There were still no official statements from the Soviet Union and China. Wanting to take advantage of the situation, a few Pakistani intelligence agents had made informal contact with Anna's core group to offer arms and ammunition. Realizing it was an opportunistic move Anna refused, despite opposition from some party members who argued that they did not care what happened to Kashmir.

‘Do you think the international pressure will work?’ Moon asked.

‘Not unless Soviet Union and China pile up pressure on Indira,’ Subbaiah replied.

‘Ganapathy, I appreciate your offer to rally the Tamil Brahmins behind our movement. If your community openly supports Anna, it will give us confidence.’

‘I am afraid open support may be difficult right now. Moon may have told you about today's visitors from the temple.’

‘Yes, he told me. I hope your friends can work out some solution. He also told me the information that you got from Damodaran, that many South Indians in Delhi are being targeted; I am sure the North Indian attackers don't differentiate between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. Your community is also a victim here, and the only way out is to join us.’

‘I will speak to Inspector Bala who is helping me in this mission. By the way I spoke to him on the phone after lunch, you can stay back here, no one will come to arrest you.’

‘It is a big relief, but I may have to sneak out once a while to my party headquarters.’

‘I insist that you and Moon come here for your meals everyday. That is the least I can do to help you in this difficult time,’ Vijaylaxmi said. ‘I have been doing a lot of thinking, and I realized that being excommunicated by the priests is no big deal. After this is over, the priests will be the ones to welcome us back with open arms.’

‘That is a load off my shoulder,’ Ganapathy said relieved, when the phone rang.

‘Oh, that must be Damodaran.’

He scampered to the phone. The perfunctory greeting later, just one word seemed to be escaping his lips ‘hmmm’ as the voice on the other end seemed to be doing most of the talking.

‘Ok machchan, take care, and be safe,’ he ended the conversation, placing the earphone on the handle.

‘What did Damodaran say? Anything new?’ Subbaiah asked Ganapathy as he settled back on his chair.

‘The situation is bad, more South Indians have been hacked to death. Curfew has finally been declared because of the international attention. It will be lifted tomorrow morning. Damodaran will be taking an Indian Airlines flight to Chennai tomorrow, all the train are full.’

‘He is a high-ranking government official isn't he? Why should he leave? The government should make arrangements for his safety.’

‘That is what he was hoping for, but is worried about his family, as all South Indians have been abandoned. The mobs are in frenzy and it is not just the North Indian Hindus, even the Sikhs have joined them. Indira has raised the bogey of a foreign hand in agitations here.’

‘Foreign hand? DMK and Swatantara Party are not funded by any foreign countries, from what I hear it is the Congress party which has been receiving election funds from Soviet Union.’

‘That doesn't matter; the people will only listen to what they want to hear. She has put the blame on CIA and ISI, saying it is an attempt to break up the country once again. Using the plank of patriotism she has asked people to break up the agitations in South India.’

‘This is the first time that an Indian Prime Minister has accused the CIA of direct intervention in our country. I guess if it works, she will continue to use it to crush any dissent in the future.’

‘Subbaiah, can I ask you something sensitive?’

‘Go ahead, I will answer to the best of my knowledge.’

‘Are you sure that the CIA and ISI haven't approached Anna or other leaders assuring help?’

‘I don't know about CIA, but yes, a few ISI agents did make an attempt to contact Anna. He refused to entertain them.’

‘Do you think he will take the CIA's help if they offer it?’

‘What kind of help can they offer? Our political front has a strong grassroots network, and we can fight on our own. That is one reason we are getting the support of a section of the military and police force. The Hindu and entire local media is backing us, but they have been forced to shut down.’

‘The Madras regiment is just one tiny unit in the Indian army; I don't think they can stand up to the might of the entire military. I think you will have to take America's help if you really want to fight the government and make it an international issue. What is happening in Delhi and Bombay is nothing short of a genocide, if it is not contained it will spread like a virus to other cities in North India.’

‘Bombay? The attacks have spread to Bombay too?’

‘That is what Damodaran told me. He has access to sensitive government information which most outsiders are unaware of.’

‘We have a very poor information network in Delhi and we could use Damodaran's contacts. You said he is coming tomorrow, maybe he can help us get the right information and also contact various embassies.’

#

Damodaran proved to be of great assistance to the movement. Two days after his arrival and a flurry of phone calls to foreign embassies, the tide was turning in their favor.

The exodus of South Indians from the northern part of the country was still continuing at a brisk pace, as the attacks on them intensified. They brought back horror stories that had the ability to churn the stomachs of even the most ferocious lions.

North Indians in the southern States were relatively unharmed, as Anna had issued strict warnings to his cadre that it was necessary to gain sympathy from the west. Despite this, many North Indians preferred to be safe and started returning back to their hometowns.

Just as the northern regiments of the Indian army reached the borders of Mysore, and the Indian Air Force was on standby to launch ariel attacks on the southern states, United States announced the withdrawal of troops from South Vietnam.

Getting a toehold on the Indian subcontinent seemed to be a more important agenda, now that its ties were strained with Pakistan, which in turn wanted to avail of this opportunity and liberate Kashmir.

Realizing that the situation could get out of hand soon, Subbaiah purchased a one-way ticket to Pyongyang and put Moon on the first flight out. He could now concentrate on the more important task of liberating South India from Indira's grip.

Although he no longer had a first hand account of the volatile situation, Moon kept regular tabs from Korea. It would be nearly two months after his departure that South India would finally gain independence. The United Nations could not intervene because of opposition from Soviet Union and China, so the United States decided to go it alone.

The final straw on the back was when Pakistan launched an attack over Kashmir, after a number of infiltrations to precipitate an insurgency in the region.

Facing a war on two fronts, Indira announced a ceasefire with the southern states and concentrated all efforts at pushing back Pakistan. The civil war that divided India was one of the shortest in history, but left a deep mark that would haunt the subcontinent for decades to come.

Chapter 15: THE CLOUDS PART

It was a bit late by the time Maya woke up from her slumber. She checked the clock on the table, it was already 10.30 am.

It had been a very long dinner with Sunder's father and they continued talking till late into the night after getting back home. She had retired back to her room, even as Naga and Sunder had a nightcap and discussed political developments in the country.

She opened the door to her room, and noticed that both had left for work. Naga had placed a note for her on the kitchen table. He had to leave early for a breakfast meeting, and promised to be back by lunchtime.

She poured herself a glass of orange juice and switched on the coffee maker. She decided to skip breakfast. The rich Dravidian food had forced a few extra kilos on her and she badly wanted to shed them, now that she was undressing in front of Naga.

She noticed newspapers lying in a heap on the floor near the sofa, the latest issue of The Economist next to it. In no mood to read anything, she switched on the TV and watched a buxom lady gyrating to loud music, as a fat dark man with a bushy upper lip danced along. She immediately started surfing channels until she reached CBS. It had been a long time, and even if it meant watching stale programs dished out by the state broadcaster, it somehow relaxed her.

A documentary on the irrigation system in Corea had just ended and titles were rolling.

Maya moaned and stared at the screen. Her mind wandered to Ganapathy and the scheduled meeting today. There was no time to lose, he had been stalling her, and

she needed more answers about Naga's father. She was certain that he was hiding something.

Suddenly she remembered the photo that Naga had showed her. There was a third person, whose face was slightly obscured.

Who was the third person? Was it Venkatramaiah?

Maya walked up to the bookshelf and searched for the packet that Naga had shown her. She located it in no time, and walked back to the sofa. Another documentary was playing on the TV, but she hardly looked up at the screen. She was now concentrating on the packet in her hands, which she had unwrapped. The diary and the newspaper clippings were all in different languages, and she could not make sense of the contents. She looked at the photo keenly. Squinting her eyes, she tried to focus on the face of the third person.

Then it struck her.

It is abboji!

Before her trip to Dravida, her father mentioned about his trip as an exchange student, his stay in the hostel, difficulty adjusting to the food and weather, near-death situation at a public rally and the tough time he had being caught in the midst of the civil war. But he never said anything about his professors, both of whom were clearly close to him, as this photo was taken in one of their houses.

Maybe they were just acquaintances, and he forgot to mention it, or, he did so on purpose. She could find out the truth only after getting back to Corea, as he had a computer phobia and even refused to open an email account.

For quick answers, Ganapathy was the only other person who could throw more light on this photo and their relationship. She decided to take the photo along for their meeting in the afternoon.

#

As soon as Ganapathy spotted Naga walking alongside Maya, he got up from the bench and raised his arms towards him.

‘You look so much like Subbaiah. How did I miss it the first time?’ he said, giving Naga a warm embrace.

Embarrassed, Naga mumbled his greetings.

‘Let us sit over there, it will be more comfortable,’ Ganapathy said pointing towards a wooden table with benches on either side.

Ganapathy sat on one side, while Naga and Maya sat on the opposite.

‘How is your mother? Is she doing well?’

‘Yes, she is in Hyderabad. She has taken a vow to step foot in Madras only if nanagaru comes back,’ Naga lied, hoping to latch on to the topic early in the conversation.

Ganapathy refused to take the bait and started describing the taste of her delicious sambar.

Naga tried the confrontationist approach. ‘Why did you lie to me that you did not know my father?’

‘Are you willing to talk to perfect strangers about your best friend? Take that man over there walking his dog. If he comes up to you and asks you about your best friend in school, will you volunteer to give all the information pronto?’ Ganapathy retorted.

Maya was afraid that they would be asked to leave again, but decided against intervening. She was confident that Naga would be able to handle the situation.

‘No, of course not, I would be suspicious, but I would not walk away rudely. I will try to get to the bottom of his curiosity.’

‘You are a young man and may have the patience to engage in nonsensical conversation with strangers about your personal life. I am not.’

‘I am sorry for misunderstanding you. I should have introduced myself as his son.’

‘Young man, you may be an experienced reporter, but remember that simple courtesies will get you a long way. If you want information, don't talk to people in an accusatory tone.’

‘I apologize once again. It was just that I have been really stressed about nanagaru's fate. I don't believe that he defected to Hindustan, and since you worked with him, I am sure you know the real story.’

‘Not just worked with him, we were best friends and neighbors for ten years. Although he was my boss, he treated me like a brother.’

‘You mean neighbors in the university campus? My mother said that we lived in the university till the day my father disappeared.’

‘Yes, and we also planned to remain neighbors after retirement. We had actually checked out houses in Goa, just near the border with Hindustan, it was the perfect retirement place.’

‘Goa? But isn't it close to the DMZ?’

‘What is Deemzee?’ Maya asked.

‘It is the demilitarized zone, a strip of land running across our border with Hindustan. It serves as a buffer zone between the two countries, 1,500 kilometres long and approximately 5 km wide. It is the most heavily militarized border in the

world, and the buffer zone is strewn with mines, so no one can cross over to either side,' Naga replied.

'Isn't it dangerous?'

'So what? People still live there, and it was the best retirement place that we could afford. The houses we chose were on a hillock, overlooking the Arabian Sea, with wonderful beaches. They were cheap precisely because they were close to the DMZ,' Ganapathy said.

'My mother never told me we have a house in Goa,' Naga said surprised.

'That is because you don't. Our wives were worried about the DMZ and convinced us to sell the houses, they preferred to settle down in Chennai.'

'So you sold the houses?'

'That's right, we recovered our investments.'

Maya realized that this was the perfect time to show him the old photograph. Before leaving for the meeting, she had discussed with Naga, and they agreed that it was the best way to make Ganapathy talk.

'Sir, was this taken in your house?' she asked, handing him the photograph.

Ganapathy looked at it and smiled, as the old memories flooded him.

'Not mine, Subbaiah's house. I would not have tolerated ugly paintings in my drawing room.'

'It is a Hussain painting, I still have it, and it is worth a lot of money now,' Naga jumped to his father's defense.

'That is because art has become commercialized. I would not waste a rupee for this painting. The value is not for the art but for the artist's signature. Even his own country threw him out, poor chap is a refugee in some Arab country I heard.'

‘Who is the third person in this photograph?’ Naga asked, not wanting to argue on the merits of the painting any further. Moon had told him that it looked like her father, but he still needed conformation. It could still have been Venkatramaiah, Ganapathy's roommate in Seoul.

‘Why, that is poor Moon, your father,’ he replied looking at Maya. ‘I still remember the dinner party. It was just before the whole agitation started. Little did we know the turmoil that would engulf our country...’

‘Did you know my father well?’

‘Of course, I told you the other day, he was a dear young man. He was staying in Subbaiah's home after the university closed, and the agitation became violent.’

‘He told me he returned back to Korea because of the problems.’

‘He did, but not before staying with us for a few days. He was injured in a stampeded on Marina Beach, and was recovering during the initial phase of the war. As soon as he got better, we packed him off home.’

‘Did you meet him in Seoul when you went to teach at SNU?’

‘Of course, we met him. He was the one who sheltered us and helped Subbaiah settle down.’

Shocked, Naga and Maya looked at each other.

‘What do you mean helped Subbaiah settle down? My father is settled down in Seoul?’ Naga anxiously asked, raising his voice.

Realizing the slip, Ganapathy, put a finger to his mouth looking sideways to see if anyone was around.

‘Not so loud, people will hear us.’

‘So he never defected to Hindustan. It was all a big lie, as I had thought? Why is he hiding in Corea?’ Naga asked, his voice quivering in excitement.

‘No, he went to Hindustan alright, but he did not defect and neither was he kidnapped.’

This was getting a little too confusing for Naga. Subbaiah could not have gone as a tourist alone without his wife. Then how did he go to Hindustan and finally land up in Corea? Why did he not come back to his own country?

Ganapathy realized the turmoil in Naga's head and decided that it was time to reveal everything. There was no point in holding on further. A son had the right to know the truth about his father.

‘Listen to me without any interruption,’ he said looking sternly at Maya.

‘Whatever questions you have, I will clarify at the end of my story. Both dutifully nodded their heads.

As Ganapathy started narrating his story, his memory jogged back, vividly recalling minute details.

A little while ago, I mentioned about our plans to remain neighbors after retirement, and the opposition we faced from our wives after we made the purchase. I also told you that we sold the houses and recovered our investment. Well, we sold it the same day that Subbaiah disappeared.

The previous morning, I received a call from our property dealer saying that a buyer had expressed interest in our properties, and was ready to sign the papers in 24 hours. We were excited, because we had been trying to offload it for two months and no one was willing to take the risk of staying so close the border.

Since it was vacation time at the university, we left immediately and caught the nine o'clock train to Mangalore. We reached at around midnight, and then took a

bus to Panjim. By the time we reached Panjim, it was afternoon, and after lunch, we had to take another bus and private jeep to go to Arambol town which was around 30 kilometers away. It was a very small town and in those days there was just one lodge, so we checked in and then went to meet the shopkeeper, who doubled as our property dealer, at around 5 in the evening.

It was the monsoon season and the rains were lashing around in full force, but we had no option, if we did not finish the deal that day, then we would have to come back in a months time, as the new buyer was leaving for England on business.

The buyer agreed to meet us at our houses, near the sweet water lake, as he had some other transactions to complete in the area.

We were soaking wet when we reached the shop, so we bought a bottle of caju feni to keep ourselves warm. Neither of us had tasted liquor before, but the shopkeeper assured us that it was a traditional drink with very little alcohol content. We sort of enjoyed the taste of cashew fruit and finished it inside the shop, Subbaiah decided to buy two more bottles for later. The shopkeeper downed his shutters and gave us a ride in his battered old car.

It took us twenty minutes to reach our property on the hilltop and the businessman was waiting for us. He had the checks ready, and we completed the formalities without any problem.

Just as were about to leave, Subbaiah had an idea. Now that the houses were no longer in our names, he asked the businessman for permission to stay the night there. He wanted to finish the bottles of feni, enjoying the sea view. Moreover it was raining heavily. The new owner had no objection, since we promised to hike back to our lodge the first thing in the morning.

We spent the night in my old house, since it had a fireplace. Nothing eventful happened, but we discussed about politics and other academic issues, enjoying feni on the balcony overlooking the Arabian Sea.

I recall we had a very intense discussion about the economic path that Dravida had chosen. He had serious misgivings about the policy directions under our first Finance Minister Raja Chellaiah. During the civil war, Raja was a professor at the University of Rajasthan, he quit his job and returned to Madras as Anna's economic advisor. When MGR was forming the first government after elections in 1971, there was tie between Subbaiah and Raja for the position.

At that time the party was divided into 2 factions- those loyal to MGR and those loyal to Karunanidhi. Although Raja was apolitical, since Subbaiah was seen as an MGR man, the Karunanidhi faction backed him for the job. To keep the party from splitting, MGR had to make Raja his finance minister.

It was big shock for Subbaiah, and he refused other honorary positions in the government, preferring to continue teaching at Madras University. At the same time, he was also trying to win back the support of the Karunanidhi faction, so that he could become finance minister in the second MGR term. He loved finding faults with Raja and tried to argue that we are not ready for an American-style capitalist society. Raja's supporters in turn accused him of being a Communist.

Make no mistake, he was against Indira's rule and had no sympathy for the communists. He only wanted a more humane capitalist system that also benefitted the poor and underprivileged.

Our discussion continued well into the early morning and before we realized, it was early morning. We did not have a wink of sleep, but we decided to set out for

our lodge. It was still slightly dark, and we had to reach Panjim by 10 O'clock to catch the bus to Mangalore, and we had no other option.

It had stopped raining, but the road leading down from my house was still slushy. We slipped many times on the way down and scraped our knees badly. As we reached the foothills, we saw a stream nearby and decided to wash ourselves of the grime. We cleaned ourselves up, and realizing that we not come across another water body for at least half an hour till our loge, we decided to complete our morning ablutions before proceeding.

We took opposite directions to hide behind bushes and finish our business. I completed my task rather quickly and came back to the pre-destined spot. Since Subbaiah had complained of constipation, the night before, I thought he needed more time.

I waited for around ten minutes, until I could spot the morning sun in the horizon, and then shouted out his name, but there was no response. I shouted three more times and then got worried that he may have slipped into the stream.

I went in the direction of his bush. There was no fresh night soil, but I noticed that there was a circular hole in the ground next to the bush. Around a meter in diameter, it was big enough for a human body to slide in. His footprints in the mud ended at the entrance of the hole.

I recalled the 1973 war with Hindustan, when they discovered four tunnels along the DMZ: Pernem, Goa; Belgaum, Karnataka; Ruyyadi and Goppili in Andhra Pradesh.

Bored through 3.5 kilometers of bedrock at a depth of 50-160 meters below ground, the tunnels were reinforced with concrete slabs and capacity to move an entire regiment per hour through it. They were lit with lamps connected to 220-volt

power lines. Equipped with a narrow-gauge railway, rail cars and drainage devices were also found inside. Clearly they had been constructed by Hindustan to prepare for a surprise attack on Dravida along different sections of the DMZ.

This was smaller than the previous ones, but big enough for Hindustanis to sneak into Dravida. I knelt down and shouted Subbaiah's name into the tunnel, but there was no response. He had disappeared. I waited for an hour, hoping he would turn up. When he did not, I left, so as to not miss my bus.

My first instinct was to inform the police about the tunnel and explain Subbaiah's disappearance. On the way back to the lodge, it occurred to me that it might not be such a good idea after all.

His opponents were already calling him a communist, and they would spread further rumors that he had voluntarily escaped to Hindustan. He was also carrying on him the check from the sale of his house. The money was quite substantial.

If the police investigated, they could easily deduce that he had bought the house with full knowledge of this tunnel, and had decided to escape after completing some spy work for Hindustan and selling the house. I myself would be a prime player in this conspiracy, so I decided to keep quite.

I went to the police station at Madras Central and lodged a report saying that after we got down from the train, a few people approached Subbaiah and forced him to follow them. That is the last I saw of him.

Naturally they assumed that he had been kidnapped, which was confirmed when Hindustan released a statement saying he had defected.

‘How did he land in Corea? Naga asked, growing impatient.

‘Young man, I told you not to interrupt me,’ Ganapathy chided and continued with his story.

After his disappearance, your mother moved back to Hyderabad with you, but I continued to teach at the university. Most people believed my story that Subbaiah had been kidnapped, but his opponents continued to spread rumors that he was a communist and had defected of his own free will.

My wife's brother was principal secretary to MGR, and he even lodged a formal complaint to the United Nations requesting investigations. We feared that he was languishing in some Hindustani prison. But there was no progress since Soviet Union and China vetoed any moves.

Nine years after his disappearance, I received a phone call from him late at night and we had a very long conversation.

He told me that he had slipped into the hole and out of curiosity had decided to check out where the tunnel leads. It was very dark, but he could see a light at a distance. After just ten minutes, he walked right into the arms of two Hindustani soldiers who were surveying the freshly dug up tunnel. They took him back with him, and he was interrogated. The first few days, he was constantly tortured, but a high-ranking army official recognized him, and realized that it would be a publicity coup if they could announce that Subbaiah had defected of his own free will.

He was taken to Delhi, now they call it Delhi, and was forced to teach Dravidian languages to potential spies. He was also responsible for their cultural training, so that the spies would easily dissolve into our local crowds once they crossed the tunnels.

After many attempts he finally managed to escape to Nepal. It took him nearly a month of trekking in the Himalayas, interior China and finally Bangkok, from where he decided to give me a call.

He originally wanted to go to the Dravidian Embassy for help, but I warned him of the situation. There was a danger that he could be arrested if he came to Madras. His opponents would have ensured that he be tried as a communist spy under our National security law.

I did not know anyone in Thailand to seek help for Subbaiah. The only foreigner I knew was Moon, and I contacted him on the number that he left with us before going back. It took some effort, but Moon finally called back, and I explained the whole situation to him.

He had just finished his PhD and was teaching at Seoul National University. He arranged for a teaching spot for me, while I used my contacts and got a fake passport for Subbaiah. I did not tell anyone this news, not even my wife. Utmost secrecy was the necessity of the day.

I met Subbaiah in Bangkok and we then flew to Seoul where Moon took care of our arrangements. After a couple of months, Subbaiah also got a teaching position at the university. I had to arrange for fake certificates in his new name. It was not that I was cheating, we had just changed the name, but all his qualifications were intact.

‘My father never mentioned anything to me. I am sure he would have told me, at least before I came to Madras,’ Maya said puzzled.

‘He knows that it is very dangerous for this information to slip out. You could have mentioned it to anyone casually. He was only trying to protect Subbaiah.’

‘So he is the Venkatramaiah who was your roommate in Seoul?’ Naga asked, still in a daze.

‘Yes he is now Venkatramaiah. He looks slightly different, having lost all his hair, and you may find it hard to recognize him,’ Ganapathy said.

‘Are you still in touch with him?’

‘Yes, we stay in touch through email, he has retired and is a Korean citizen. Moon helped him settle down in Pyongyang. He keeps pestering me to find out about your mother and you, but I could not trace her whereabouts. After your grandmother died, she changed her address. Wait till I tell him this news. Imagine, his son and Moon's daughter together, it is going to astonish him.’

‘Amma will be thrilled. I am supposed to take Maya to Hyderabad tomorrow, we can break this news to her,’ Naga said, tears rolling down his cheeks.

‘Hold it; do not tell her anything now. It is very dangerous. No one should know that he is alive. You should take her to Korea and surprise her.’

#

A week later, on August 1st, at 11 pm, Naga was pacing the floor at Gate 23A of Annadurai International Airport, impatient for the boarding announcement of Flight CE 609 to Pyongyang.

Maya was sitting next to his old mother, taking care of her needs. She decided to cut short the visit and come back for her research later. Meeting Naga's father was more important, and more importantly she could get to see her baby once again.

The only way they could get Naga's mother to accompany them was to pretend that they were going to Korea to meet her parents and finalize their marriage. A white lie for now, it was still a possibility, though it would take time. Of course his mother would forget the deal, once she met Subbaiah and caught up with her past.

Finally the boarding call, as Naga stopped in his tracks, his heart thumping.

‘Whatever happens, happens for the good!’

GLOSSARY

Aatmasamaan – Self-respect (Hindi)

Abboji- Father (Korean)

Aigoo- Oops (Korean)

Amma- Mother

Anni- Sister in law (Tamil)

Apdi aa – Is that so (Tamil)

Appa- Father

Avakaaya- Mango pickle

Balli – Gecko, house lizard

Balli Dosha Shastram- Astrology that tells about the lizard falling effects

Bosingtang- Korean soup that includes dog meat as its primary ingredient

Bulgogi- Korean dish that usually consists of grilled marinated beef, chicken or pork

Chinkies- Derogatory term used to refer to the mongoloid race

Chosŏn Chŏnjaeng- Korean War

Da / Daai – Hey man (Tamil)

Dal – Lentil soup

Danil minjok – One nation with pure Blood. It is based on the belief that Koreans form a nation, a race, or an ethnic group that shares a unified bloodline and a distinct culture.

Dharna- A fast undertaken as a means of obtaining compliance with a demand for justice

Eonni- Sister in law (Korean)

Ganja- Marijuana

Garu- Respectful title (Telugu)

Ghe Shiki – Son of bitch (Korean)

Glasnost- Policy that called for increased openness and transparency in government institutions and activities in the Soviet Union

Gochujang- Savory and pungent fermented Korean condiment made from red chili, glutinous rice, fermented soybeans and salt

Golti A racist term used for people from Andhra Pradesh, implying that they are extremely stupid in an adorable way.

Guru dakshina- Tradition of repaying one's teacher or guru after a period of study or the completion of formal education

Haejanguk- Thick, spicy, and very hearty soup made from ox (beef) bone broth with soybean paste

Hallyu- The Korean wave, refers to the significant increase in the popularity of South Korean entertainment and culture starting in the 1990s, in Asia, and more recently in other parts of the world

Ilaneer- Tender coconut water

Iljae Sidae- Period of Japanese rule over Korea

Janeu- Holy thread that is worn by the Hindu Brahmins of India

Jegichagi- Korean traditional game It requires the use of people's foot and Jegi, which looks like a badminton shuttlecock, made of paper, or cloth. The player kicks a jegi up in the air and keeps on kicking to prevent from falling to the ground. In a one-to-one game, a player with the most number of consecutive kicks wins.

Kaaliala – derogatory racist term used to refer to black people

Kapu- Vaishya caste in Andhra

Kamzhatang- Spicy pork bone soup made with pork spine, vegetables, green onion, hot peppers and ground wild sesame seeds

Kimchi-Traditional fermented Korean dish made of vegetables with a variety of seasonings. It is Korea's national dish, and there are hundreds of varieties made with a main vegetable ingredient such as napa cabbage, radish, scallion, or cucumber

Kunjoos- Stingy (Hindi)

Lathi-Means stick and also refers to a martial art based on cane fighting. The word is used in Hindi, Bengali and various other languages.

Lorries- Trucks

Lungi- Traditional garment worn around the waist in Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, the Horn of Africa and the southern Arabian Peninsula

Machchan- Brother-in-law, also used as a friendly greeting (Tamil)

Mallu – Short for Malayalam speaking people, the language spoken in the southern state of Kerala

Makgeolli- Alcoholic beverage native to Korea, made from a mixture of wheat and rice, which gives it a milky, off-white color, and sweetness

Naan – A leavened, oven-baked flatbread that is typical of and popular in West, Central and South Asia

Nadan curry- Kerala beef curry

Narak- Hell (Hindi)

Pitaji – Father (Hindi)

Rajya Sabha- Upper House of the Indian Parliament

Rakshash – Demon (Hindi)

Rowdies- Gangsters, lumpen

Saala – Brother-in-law(Hindi), also used affectionately for friends

Saar - Sir

Sambar- A vegetable stew or chowder based on a broth made with tamarind and pigeon peas, and is very popular in the cooking of southern regions of India

Samguk Yusa- Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms, is a collection of legends, folktales, and historical accounts relating to the Three Kingdoms of as well as to other periods and states before, during, and after

Satyagraha- Fast

Shikoro – Shut up (Korean)

Shikya- Bastard (Korean)

Soju- A distilled beverage native to Korea, comparable to vodka, though often slightly sweeter

Suprabhatam- Auspicious dawn prayer

SCATTERED FATES RAM GARIKIPATI

Tauba Tauba- God forbid (Hindi)

Thalaivar – Leader (Tamil)

Thammuda- Younger brother (Telugu)

Ttong – Shit (Korean)

Upama- simple rice snack usually served for breakfast

Vatan – Country, motherland (Hindi)

Yaar- Dear Friend (Hindi)

Zamindari - A zamindar was an aristocrat, typically hereditary, who held enormous tracts of land and held control over his peasants, from whom they reserved the right to collect tax. The Mughals introduced the system

Zutho- Fermented drink obtained from rice commonly consumed by all Naga tribes in the rural regions of Nagaland